Meaning-Making for Mothers in the North East of England: an Ethnography of Baptism

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Abstract

The purpose of this study has been primarily to explore the meaning of baptism to mothers in the North-East. It also aims to address the situation in which despite a decline in regular congregations the church receives a significant number of requests for baptisms amongst families who rarely return to church attendance after the baptism. To explore these issues the thesis has reviewed the available literature on baptism, and adopted several methods to 'hear the voices' of mothers and parish clergy. These include participant observation, interviewing, questionnaires, and reflexivity. Chapter 2 looks at the story of the research, situating it within a history of infant baptism and describing how I did the research. Chapters 3 – 5 summarise and describe the data from focus groups, the questionnaire and from conversations with mothers and with clergy. Chapters 6 – 8 offer an analysis of the data; Chapters 9 – 10 offer a theological interpretation of the data; and Chapter 11 highlights some implications of the research for the Church.

While much has been written on the rite of Baptism from a historical, theological and ecclesiological perspective, there has been little work done on the perceptions of the mothers who participate in the rite. I argue that Baptism is as meaningful for mothers as it is for the clergy as connections are made to the past and to the future, to the gathered community and to God. I explore the christening as an opportunity for mothers to perform motherhood, displaying themselves and their children as 'respectable'. I interpret this as their ascribing social and familial identity to the child and developing their own family (howsoever

constructed) narratives. Theoretically speaking, I argue that, in Rappaport's terms, the Ultimate Sacred Postulate for these mothers is family, with the child representing renewed hope for the perpetuation of that family.

This thesis exposes the challenge faced by a mission-focussed Church, seeking to halt decline through growing congregations, when faced with women (and, indeed, families) whose sense of belonging and desire for God's blessing does not lead to regular (or even occasional) commitment to a congregation.

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Acknowledgements

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Chapter One: Introducing the Research

1.1 Research Rationale

For most women (and men) the birth of their first child is a moment of high significance. Even in societies with excellent levels of midwifery care,[1] it is still a time of danger for the mother and indeed for the child.[2] It always involves a change of identity for the mother, who is now defined through her relationship status as 'mother'.[3] Her identity is no longer her own but is closely associated with that of the other.[4]

My aim is to explore this period of transition for mothers as reflected in their experiences and views of the christening of their child, and so what meaning it holds for them. My aim is an interpretative understanding of the aims and values which govern mothers' attitudes to this action; why they persist and sometimes insist on this rite of passage in church, even though they would not consider themselves to be (apart from their own baptism[5]) church members.[6]

As a priest in the Church of England and as a mother, I have been increasingly aware of a dissonance between those who attend church for these occasional offices, such as baptism,[7]

[1] Debra Bick, 'Maternal mortality in the UK: The impact of the increasing complexity of women's lives', *Midwifery* 24:1, (2008), pp.1-2.
[2] Margaret Peters, 'Safe Motherhood – a Journey', *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery* (44:2)**,** 1999, 145-150.
[3] Helen Callaway, 'The Most Essentially Female Function of All: Giving Birth', in *Defining Females,* ed. by Shirley Ardener, (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 163-85.
[4] See Diane Speier, 'Becoming a Mother', *Journal of the Association of Research on Mothering,* 3:1, (2001), 7–18, p.14.
[5] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World,* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p.72.
[6] As I alternate between the use of the words 'christening' and 'baptism' in this paragraph it becomes obvious that the very term is important in this research, highlighting some of the issues, and will be addressed later in this chapter.
[7] This can be seen particularly in the introduction to Martin Ramsden's doctoral thesis, *Heeding the Great Commission: the significance of Matthew's Gospel for Baptismal Theology and Practice in a Post-Christian Age*, Durham University, 2006, www.etheses.dur.ac.uk/2645, [accessed 11/4/2011].

and the usual, often dwindling,[8] Sunday congregation who can feel used (even abused) by these 'visitors' in the process.[9]

In order to understand the social meaning of the mothers' views on baptism it was important to place their meaning making against the backdrop of the meaning of baptism from other perspectives, most notably other members of the congregation and Church of England priests. The Church of England priests with whom I talked in this study unavoidably experience the dissonance of this ritual: they are obliged by canon law to baptise any parishioner for whom baptism is requested even though they might suspect they have no intention of making an ongoing Christian commitment.[10] As I seek to explore the meaning of the rite for mothers, I shall also examine the meaning for these priests who negotiate their way through many layers of symbols and their meanings. Baptism is multi-vocal.

It is hoped that despite the limitations of its scope, this research will contribute to a 'thickening'[11] of the understanding of baptism which may enlighten, even partially, church practice: speaking into current practice and suggesting steps for the future. I shall argue that the christening incorporating the gathering of family is key in conferring a social identity to the child and in reinforcing the identity of the family (which may itself be considered 'sacred').

[8] This is discussed in the recent Church of England report 'From Anecdote to Evidence' (The Church Commissioners for England, 2014) particularly from page 23.
[9] Gilly Myers, *Using Common Worship Initiation: A Practical Guide to the New Services* (Church House Publishing, 2000), p.26.
[10] Canon B21 discussed by Mark Earey, Trevor Lloyd, and Ian Tarrant, *Connecting with Baptism: A Practical Guide to Christian Initiation Today* (London: Church House Publishing, 2007), p.59.
[11] Clifford Geertz describes ethnography as 'thick description' which is both interpretive and microscopic in 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture' in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (1973) http://quod.lib.umich.edu.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb01005 [accessed 1/6/15].

My aim is to understand how those who are participating understand baptism, rather than presuming a hypothesis or definition construed from either systematic theology or liturgical history. Much has been written on the history of baptism, from the perspective of theologians but it is not the intention of this thesis to explore this body of work, but rather to broaden the previous work of practical theologians by exploring the experience of the mothers who participate in the Church of England's rite of baptism. [12] This will create an opportunity for the voices of these female participants (who could be said to be a 'muted group'[13]) to be heard. My intention is to allow the mothers who participated to speak for themselves.

If we think of the voices and meanings of mothers as constituting one model of baptism and the voices and meanings of the church community as constituting another, then we can see that the model with hegemony, the dominant model, lies in the latter. However, the women who are both mothers and members of the church community, aware of the dominant hegemony, operate their meaning-making across the two models. I would suggest that for many of those who are not part of the church community asking the local parish priest to christen their baby, although it may fulfil social expectations, requires some courage because their culture is so far removed from the culture of the church (or perhaps because the culture of the church is so far removed from that of these women) and because the language we (theologians, clergy, church-goers) might use to talk about God is unfamiliar. Moreover, expressions of faith, which many find difficult to articulate, may lie outside, or tangential, to the model of baptism which governs these mothers in the North East. The aim of this research is to highlight these different models and to suggest ways of better negotiations between these meaning-makers.

[12] The variety of attitudes towards 'indiscriminate' infant baptism is discussed by Dalby and Kuhrt: Gordon Kurht, *Believing in Baptism* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1987), Mark Dalby, *Open Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1989).

[13] The term 'muted group' was coined by anthropologist Charlotte Hardman and developed by Edwin Ardener in 'Belief and the Problem of Women', in *Perceiving Women* ed. by Shirley Ardener (London: Malaby Press, 1975), 1 – 19.

1.2 Practical Theology

The discipline of Practical Theology, in which my work as a whole can be located, offers both a methodology and a model for 'doing' theology – a model of praxis. For David Lyall,

> It is concerned with practice and it is an academic discipline; it seeks to serve both the mission of the Church and the needs of the world; it touches that which is most personal and engages with that which is most public. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that practical theology cannot be defined too precisely – nor should we try to do so.[14]

Practical Theology uses 'The Pastoral Cycle', a model developed by Ballard and Pritchard from the Kolb Learning Cycle[15] and from the work of Don Browning.[16] Ballard and Pritchard suggest that the reflection it encourages develops out of some sort of conflict. There is then a critical analysis of the story, paying deeper attention to the issues and drawing on the wisdom of social sciences. The theological reflection follows this and the response may be a new way of approaching the situation or behaving in it. Although this framework provides a useful model, it is, as with any model, one which needs to be approached with some flexibility. It comprises four stages: experience, (giving the situation 'total attentiveness'[17]); analysis (exploring what is really going on through engaging in mutual conversation with human sciences[18]); theological reflection (bringing into the conversation values and faith[19]); action (responding with new understanding[20]). My work follows these stages: in chapters 3-5 I pay attention to the story; in chapters 6-8 I develop a critical analysis

[14] David Lyall, 'Editorial: So, What Is Practical Theology?' *Practical Theology*, 2:2, (2009), pp.158–9.
[15] Judith Thompson, Stephen Pattison, and Ross Thompson, *Theological Reflection*, (London: SCM, 2008), p.51.
[16] Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive Strategies and Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
[17] Ballard, Paul, and Pritchard, John, *Practical Theology in Action - Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* 2nd edn. (London: SPCK, 1996), p.97.
[18] Ballard and Pritchard, p.113.
[19] Ballard and Pritchard, p.77.
[20] Ballard and Pritchard, p.78.

while drawing on the wisdom of social sciences; in chapters 9-10 I offer some theological interpretation; and in the final chapter I develop some ministerial outcomes.

While the Pastoral Cycle has been widely adopted, it has been criticised[21] and other models proposed which develop Ballard and Pritchard's work.[22] Of these, I shall be mostly using Pattison's concept of theological reflection as being a critical conversation. Written in 1989, Pattison's article was intended to offer a method in which 'the word 'theology' must be set free from dusty academic bondage'.[23] Pattison suggests that this critical conversation is three-way, between the researcher's own beliefs, perceptions and assumptions; those of the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation. In this model he is aiming to account for the complexities involved in theological reflection which, 'understood as active enquiry is as much about exploring and living with gaps as well as similarities.'[24]

Pattison is not, however, without critics and acknowledges the shortcomings of the model he proposes, while maintaining that it is a valid starting point. Michael Northcott suggests that Pattison should have included a fourth participant in his conversation: the secular disciplines including psychology, sociology and organisational theory.[25] I would suggest that my work is, as Pattison describes, a critical conversation between the mothers who bring their babies to be baptised; the clergy who are responsible for their pastoral care; with both theology and social sciences as Northcott advocates; and with myself as key in the construction of

[21] Not least by Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM, 2008), pp.33-50.
[22] For instance: Emmanuel Lartey, 'Practical Theology as a Theological Form' in, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. by J. Woodward, and S. Pattison, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000),128 – 135, also Laurie Green, *Let's do Theology*, (London: Continuum, 2002), pp.128-134.
[23] Stephen Pattison, 'Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection' in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 135-148, p.137.
[24] Pattison, p.140.
[25] Michael Northcott, 'The Cases Study Method in Theological Education', in John Swinton and David Willows, *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), p.63.

conversations. Pattison's model includes the researcher as a participant in the conversation: as I reflect in the following section, as a researcher I have not only participated in conversations with mothers but to some extent chosen whom I would talk to, set the agenda and made key decisions in the analysis of the data.

1.3 Qualitative Methodology

This research is about meaning making around Baptism, so the approach I chose to take towards this has been qualitative, 'a human construction, framed and presented within a particular set of discourses.'[26] My objective was not to produce a large amount of data which might be considered representative, but rather data which uncovered meaning. In paying attention to the rite of baptism, I listen to the stories of the participants: not only mothers who bring insider and outsider perspectives,[27] but also clergy. As I enter into dialogue with these participants, I shall draw on relevant literature from the fields of sociology and anthropology as I begin to suggest an interpretative framework. This negotiation of both meaning and power between myself, the mothers and clergy participants leads to a mutual interdependent creation of knowledge.

To some extent specific research questions have evolved as the research developed in order that I might explore what is really going on rather than beginning from a fixed point.[28] So each phase of the research informs the next. The combination of participant observation and different kinds of interviewing I chose to use has offered a number of perspectives on the meaning-making of baptism, contributing to a 'thick' description, providing a more complex

[26] Keith F. Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, (London: Sage, 1998), p.140.
[27] This is discussed by Russell T. McCutcheon 'General Introduction' in *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* ed. by Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell Academic, 1999), 1-14.
[28] M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman refer to this as 'tight' (prespecified research questions) vs 'loose' (unfolding), *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2nd edn. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p.16.

picture and leading to an integrated understanding of the rite. This leads to, in Goffman's words, 'deep familiarity' with the research field.[29]

The use of questionnaires (with mothers who belonged to congregations) might suggest a quantitative methodology but this was not the case. They were actually a form of structured interview in which the respondents answered set questions and told their story.[30] The number of open responses in these questionnaires produced data which is primarily qualitative,[31] so the picture I begin to build in chapter three, based on the fifty six questionnaires which were returned, stays close to how these social actors understand their own activities.[32]

During my research, I made use of the cycle of praxis described in the previous section, and based on the Pastoral Cycle. In addition, my methodology was influenced by the feminist practical theologians such as Berry, Slee and Graham[33] who would seek to hear the voice of women; and by the ethnographic approach[34] which also pays attention to the voices of participants. The listening involved in this research and the attention to these voices may be considered to be a form of spiritual practice: attending to the symbols, the hesitancies, and the performance as much as to the words. Feminist theologian Nicola Slee refers to the importance of such listening:

> All the time we are listening at many different levels: to self, to the other, to the literature, to the Spirit at work in each of these… The way we listen as women researchers is… a form of spiritual practice that has many of the

[29] E. Goffman, 'On Fieldwork', Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 18:2, (1989), 123 – 132.
[30] David Byrne, *Interpreting Quantitative Data*, 146.
[31] As described by Colin Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002), 253.
[32] As discussed by Max Travers, *Qualitative Research Through Case Studies* (London: SAGE, 2001), 5.
[33] Jan Berry, *Ritual Making Women: Shaping Rites for Changing Lives* (London: Equinox, 2009), Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), Elaine Graham, *Words Made Flesh* (London, SCM, 2009).
[34] Charlote Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London: Routledge, 1998).

> qualities of prayer understood as the most attentive listening to self, other and God as we can manage.[35]

Because of the part-time nature of my research, the phases were spread out over several years, but at the same time my familiarity with baptism was also developing due to my role as a parish priest: during the period of the research I baptised over a hundred infants and children. Although my own experiences of baptism in various context are not part of the data I draw upon in this research, they have contributed to a 'tissue of events'[36] influencing both the process of data-gathering and interpretation of that data.

1.4 Ethnography

It is the gaps between the theology and the lived experience of baptism in which I am interested and which I hope to reveal as meaningful: 'Ethnography is a method for researching and understanding both the gaps and the connections between theology and lived faith practices.'[37] Moschella describes the suitability of ethnography as a method for Practical Theology suggesting that ethnography needs to be situated within a community, (using the congregation as an example). My research, however, is based among those who are on the edges of church life: who appear to belong to the community through christening, but are unlikely to articulate their beliefs. Nevertheless, the ethnographic method leads to a nuanced approach which pays attention through conversation with mothers and with clergy, and the opportunity to observe performance.

[35] Nicola Slee, 'Feminist Qualitative Research as Spiritual Practice: Reflections on the Process of Doing Qualitative Research', in *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, ed. by Nicola Slee, Fran Porter, Anne Phillips (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 13–24, p.18.
[36] Erving Goffman, 'On Fieldwork', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18:2, (1989), 123-132, p.130.
[37] Mary Clark Moschella, 'Ethnography', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. by Bonnie J L Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

In ethnography it is important that observations are made before any conclusions are drawn, so the research is based upon careful observation at each stage, in order to build a cumulative and thick description of what is going on. Moschella describes ethnography as 'observing people's actions and interactions, and asking them to share their stories with you.'[38] This, she argues, is pastoral practice as it engages with 'The Living Human Web.'[39] This attention to human experience attends also to the experience of God revealed in and through human relationships.

Ethnography, based on observation and listening, offers glimpses into the lived experience of 'fellow human beings.'[40] This careful attention – to the material, the articulated, the performed - is important to Practical Theology. In my work, this engagement takes the form of a conversation between the mothers considered 'insiders' or 'outsiders' and the clergy. This conversation has occurred through interviews, with the use of questionnaires enabling me to engage with more mothers, listening to the stories written as well as those spoken.

1.5 Reflexivity

While this research would seem to be about others, it is also about me in that I can not remove myself from it. The cultural systems of which I am part, are deeply embedded in my patterns of thinking, and whilst I might acknowledge these, this can be only superficial. As a researcher I am, as Finley explains, always present:

[38] Moschella, 'Ethnography', p.4.
[39] 'The Living Human web' was a term developed by Bonnie Miller McLemore to argue that human beings are interconnected through a complex series of relationships and is discussed in 'Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology', Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology, ed. by Bonnie Miller McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 77 – 95, p.90.
[40] H Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4th edn. (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira, 2006), p.213.

> As qualitative researchers engaged in contemporary practice, we accept that the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data. We recognize that research is co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship. We understand that meanings are negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story. We no longer seek to eradicate the researcher's presence.....[41]

As a new mother, I had been overwhelmed by the experience of motherhood: the transforming of identity, the exhaustion, the love. I brought my son to baptism although I was not attending church regularly, expecting that my experiences might be acknowledged. I was disappointed. While I cannot make assumptions that this experience would be comparable to that of the mothers whose stories I have heard, it has been a personal driver in this research. As De Vault has said, 'Almost any fieldwork report can be considered a personal narrative of sorts.'[42]

My hope is for the church, its pastoral care, and liturgies to serve women well. Moustakas describes the process of reflexivity even in terms of forming the research question: 'The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher.'[43] While that concern drives this research, it may also hinder it, as I carry with me the institutions of motherhood and church, my struggles with them and my identity within them. While I can listen to the experiences of others and how they might negotiate their own way between experience and institution, I am aware of the tendency in qualitative research for the researcher to bring her story into the stories of others.[44]

[41] Linda Finlay, 'Negotiating the Swamp: the Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice', *Qualitative Research*, 2:2, (2002), 209 – 230.
[42] Marjorie L DeVault, 'Personal Writing in Social Research: Issues of Production and Interpretation', in Rosanna Hertz (ed) *Reflexivity and Voice* (London: Sage, 1997), 216-228, p.218.
[43] C. Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Application (*Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), p.27.
[44] Van Maanen refers to this as he writes about 'realist tales' in *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 64-66.

My participant involvement is even more complicated by the fact that I am a priest and my role in baptism has changed. I have experienced a tension between this representative role and a pastoral desire to meet the needs of mothers and fathers however inarticulately they are expressed.[45] The role of the priest in this instance is not a straightforward one, yet it is pivotal. Again, I am a participant, and one with a vested interest as a gatekeeper to the church's rites.

Feminist sociologists and theologians emphasise the importance of the acknowledgement of power in research. As a white middle class educated and ordained woman I possess social capital. While I might dress casually and speak with a local accent, this cannot disguise the power I embody: my identity, character, and privilege all affect my data collection, presentation and interpretation. This is of importance to the research relationships and requires acknowledgement. However, as Ahern comments: 'It is worth remembering that even if preconceptions and biases are acknowledged, they are not always easily abandoned.'[46] So, there are layers of interpretation which are influencing my research at every level, some of these I am aware of and can acknowledge, others are so culturally consonant that I remain unaware of them.

Ethnography is also constructed through relationship with others. My relationships with the mothers and clergy in this research are the primary vehicle for eliciting findings and insights. With both groups I had commonalities and differences. I hoped to use the commonalities to

[45] Sociologist, Max Weber has written about this representative role, describing priests as 'primary protagonists and representatives of those sacred norms'. Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p.417.
[46] Ahern, K.J., 'Ten Tips for Reflexive Bracketing' *Qualitative Health Research*, 9, (1999), 407 – 411, p.410.

develop reciprocal relationship during our conversations: so with the mothers I revealed that I, too am a mother, shared experiences of toddler groups (which I have both attended and run), and wore clothing which I hoped was neutral; with the clergy, many of whom were my colleagues, I was able to discuss baptism practices, openly sharing some of my experiences in order that they might share theirs; for some of these conversations I wore clerical attire. However perhaps it was the differences which were of more importance, highlighting inequalities of power. Many of the mothers had been told I was both a researcher and a vicar – some seemed to think I was asking about how well the vicar had performed at the baptism. During my conversations with the clergy, I was obviously making notes or recording our conversations and I think they were aware of the control which that allowed me. While the clergy had the power as gatekeepers to reach participants (which they used), I have the power of editorship. It is difficult to know which aspects of myself or my conversation acted as catalysts for changing the dynamics of the interactions, although when I interviewed Laura and Mick it was clear that they had recognised me from the baptism of their cousin's baby two weeks earlier. This very clearly changed the dynamics of the conversation as it gave us something in common – I was no longer a stranger.

I visited the mothers in their homes for the conversations, although one woman had arranged to meet me in her sister's home. Most of the women had other people present in the house at least at the beginning of our meeting – a sister, parent, or partner. Some of the women had rearranged our meeting time in order that they were not alone for the conversation. However, most of these chaperones left fairly soon after our meeting began, Sarah's father asking her specific permission to do so. I took that to be an indication that neither the mother nor her accompanier felt threatened by me. However, although I was a visitor in their home, very few offered me the cup of tea which I might have expected. This suggests a withholding of

hospitality: I was not quite a guest. Nor did I behave as a good guest, I deliberately overstayed: allowing time for silence and chat when my main topics had been dealt with; this gave the mothers the opportunity to talk as they wished with painful experiences of miscarriage, infertility and depression being revealed.

With both mothers and clergy there was a co-construction of meaning as I asked them what they thought was going on in baptism. Several of the mothers talked about other people they knew who only had a christening as an excuse for a party or, even worse, to get drunk. Claire in particular had remembered talking about christening as part of her 'A' level Religious Studies course and was keen to both listen to my views and share her own. Part of the reason for my conversations with clergy was to enable this co-construction of meaning. I was less concerned with their formal theology of baptism than with their observations about the meaning-making of the mothers whom they encountered and how they understood their own role within that.

1.6 Recruiting Participants

Because I have lived in the North-East for most of my life and I have been a parish priest in both Newcastle and Durham dioceses, I wanted to situate this research within these two dioceses: there has been little theological work done among women here (although most recently, Clarke-King studied the spirituality of women in the East End of the city).[47] However, I did find it more difficult than I had anticipated to recruit participants. The nature of the research was that the parish priest who is responsible for baptism policy would be the gatekeeper. It was important therefore that these gatekeepers were committed to this

[47] Ellen Clark-King, *Theology by Heart*, (Peterborough: Epworth, 2004).

research. These clergy (comprising three men and three women) represented a microcosm of the various traditions within the Anglican Church, which, broadly speaking, can be categorised as Evangelical, Liberal or Anglo-Catholic. Although in the beginning stages the women of the Mothers' Union embraced my research and me with friendly hospitality, it was less easy to recruit willing parish priests (particularly women).

Within Newcastle Diocese there are more men than women who are responsible for parishes.[48] There was an issue caused through my move to an inner-city parish on the west of the city: the new team rector had already agreed to participate, but in anticipation of a possible conflict of role between researcher and parish priest, she dropped out. In another parish, a woman priest who had agreed to participate had accepted another position and for practical reasons could no longer be part of the research.

I invited four other female parish priests in Newcastle to participate but all of them felt unable to do so: the reasons they offered were that the parishes had other priorities, that they did not have time, were too new in post, so did not yet have a coherent baptism policy worked out for their ministry. This all took time with people not returning calls immediately and reluctant to get back to me. At the stage when I had only four parishes lined up to participate, I decided to expand the research to take in a wider area and asked two women priests who are my friends to participate. This pre-existing relationship will have coloured the research, but it has also meant that I could ensure their commitment throughout the research process.

[48] In Newcastle Diocese there are 31 women clergy in charge of parishes, and 79 men. (Statistics provided by the diocesan office, February, 2013).

My sense about this is that my questions about baptism exposed the clergy's own vulnerability and uncertainty about the compromises they were making in their practice for which they had no theological explanation. This was borne out even in the questions the male participants asked me. One in particular was concerned about anonymity and another about the level of feedback he would receive. Because this thesis will be published online, I have therefore taken the decision in the following section to remove the references giving sources for social data as they would compromise this anonymity.

The final parish recruited was St Ebba's. The vicar, although agreeing to participate, did express her concerns. We had had an earlier conversation about the difficulties I was having in recruiting particularly female parish priests, and she was able to say that although she wanted to support the research not only because I am a friend but also because of her own struggles reconciling the liturgies, the theology and the reality of baptism, she still had not been able to agree readily: feeling that this research would constitute a judgement on her practice about which she was already uncertain. She wondered if this might begin to account for the difficulty I had experienced in recruiting women. It does raise the question about whether women in ministry are less secure or less confident than men about their practice.

1.7 Hearing into Speech

Part of the task of theology, is to attend to the untold stories of those whose voices have been 'other' and so not heard. Nelle Morton observed the silencing of both women and men, and her phrase, 'hear them into speech',[49] has been much referenced in Feminist Theology. Referring to Morton, Mary Grey writes that, 'what is needed is a hearing engaged in by the

[49] Nelle Morton, 'Beloved Image', in *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), pp.127-8.

whole body that evokes speech – a new speech – a new creation.'[50] Morton believes that reclaiming the experience of women is itself redemptive, describing God as the 'hearing one'.[51]

Of course, the means of hearing is significant. In many of the interviews it has been of note that I am a woman interviewing other women, many of whom lack formal education or any sort of power in society. For them, participating in research may be empowering.[52] Elaine Graham writes that women, 'are so fundamentally absent from patriarchy that they cannot possibly occupy the same narrative space as men'.[53] This may be encountered when interviewing women whose fields of reference lie outside male structures. The interview structure, in Slee's words, 'needs to be reframed with women's communicative patterns in mind'.[54] It has therefore been important to conduct the research in such a way that the women who participate are enabled to find a voice to express their beliefs about, and experience of, baptism.

In the early 1970s, social anthropologist Edwin Ardener discussed the reasons why women are so often absent in the studies of social anthropology, claiming that, 'it is the very inarticulateness of women that is the technical part of the problem they present.'[55] That is, in societies where men's models dominate, women can be unheard because their ways of speaking and making meaning are overlooked. Ardener went on to adopt Hardman's term, 'muted group' in adapting his model:

[50] Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Redemption and Christian Tradition*, (London: SPCK, 1989), p.1.
[51] Nelle Morton, p.129.
[52] Allison Fenton, 'A Case Study: Elaine Graham and The Good City' in *Not Behind our Backs, Feminist Questions and Public Theology* ed. by Stephen Burns, and Anita Monro (Sheffield: Equinox, 2014), 117-126.
[53] Elaine Graham, 'Only Bodies Suffer: Embodiment, Representation and the Practice of Ethics', in Words Made Flesh, p.117.
[54] Slee, Women's Faith Development, p.56.
[55] Edwin Ardener, 'Belief and the Problem of Women', in *Perceiving Women*, p.2.

> We may speak of 'muted groups and 'articulate groups' along this dimension…'What is it that makes a group muted?' We then become aware that it is muted simply because it does not form part of the dominant communicative system of the society – expressed as it must be through the dominant ideology, and that 'mode of production', if you wish, which is articulated with it.[56]

'Muted Group Theory' has been further developed by Cheris Kramerae[57] and explored in the fields of linguistics and social anthropology. It is relevant to my research in interviewing women, particularly in a church context, because it refers to the muted structures which may not be realised in the language of the dominant structure. The women in my pilot study belong to a male structured church where male voices are dominant and yet their muted voice may be discerned in the symbols which they use.

While linguistic theory in gender would suggest that not all women (or indeed men) speak the same way, some differences can be highlighted: Julia Davies, in her study of groups of girls and boys in the classroom showed that girls' discourse styles involved both personal narrative and highly collaborative, jointly constructed texts whereas the boys' talk was less focussed and less cooperative.[58] Ann Oakley suggests that interviewing women is a 'contradiction in terms':[59] traditional interview techniques have been developed from a male hierarchical paradigm. This led to her adopting a less structured approach in her research on women and childbirth, during which she was asked questions by the participants (which she chose to

[56] Edwin Ardener, 'The 'Problem' Revisited', in *Perceiving Women*, p.22.
[57] Cheris Kramerae, *Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981).
[58] Julia Davies, 'Expressions of Gender: An Analysis of Pupils' Gendered Discourse Styles' in *Language and Gender: A Reader* ed. by J. Coates, and P. Pichler (London: Routledge, 2011), 115-132.
[59] Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in *Doing Feminist Research* ed. by H. Roberts (London, New York: Routledge, 1981), 30-61.

answer), so the 'interview' was less formal and the boundaries of the researcher/participant relationship more fluid.

Peter Collins develops Oakley's work, suggesting that any 'interview', even the most (apparently) unstructured, is strategic. He describes his interviews as comprising, 'accounts of events together with attempts to interpret them on the part of the interviewer and interviewee, but the process is haphazard and tentative'.[60] So he describes interviews as a construction of selves which happens between interviewer and interviewed. It is, he suggests, a fluid relationship in which power is ambiguous and through which mutual understanding is negotiated.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the rationale for my research, the theories which underpin the research decisions I have taken, and acknowledged my own presence as a conversation partner seeking to negotiate understanding. Although I have referred to the methodology of the research, that is, the rationale for the decisions I have taken throughout, I have not discussed nor explained in details the methods, that is, the ways in which I carried out the research. In the next chapter I describe in detail these methods and place the research in a social context – of place, history and literature.

[60] Peter Collins, 'Negotiating Selves: Reflections on 'Unstructured' Interviewing', *Sociological Research Online*, 3:3, (1998), www.socresonline.org.uk/3/3/2.html, [accessed 19/7/12].

Chapter Two: Locating the Research and Methods

2.1 How I locate my research in broader work

As I began this research I was surprised at how little I found in the literature about how motherhood might be considered theologically outside a patriarchal hegemony. In the commentaries about baptism I found doctrine,[61] the history of the liturgy,[62] ecclesiology[63] written by (mainly) male theologians, little of which represented a female perspective, and still less the meaning-making of mothers. I have, therefore, placed my research within a broader framework of theoretical discourse: relying heavily upon the academic discourse around ritual theory; feminist discussions around motherhood and mothering (within theology and social sciences); a body of research around 'folk religion'; psychological and anthropological considerations of material culture; the arguments which relate to identity.

Until I began to analyse the data I collected, I was not able to discern how the mothers in my research would be making meaning from this rite of baptism. In this section I offer an overview of some areas of the literature which are of relevance, but I will mainly follow Wolcott by drawing upon the literature throughout the thesis, 'selectively and appropriately as needed in the telling of their story...'[64]

Alan Billings is one of a few commentators on why women bring their babies to baptism. He suggests there are four reasons: a showing of the baby; a rite of passage for parents (he

[61] Thomas A Marsh, *Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1984), Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978).
[62] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd edn. (London :SPCK, 2002,); Maxwell E Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1999); David F Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).
[63] Mark Searle, (ed.), *Alternative Futures for Worship vol 2: Baptism and Confirmation* (Collegeville; The Liturgical Press, 1987), Timothy Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). A notable exception being Natalie Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).
[64] Harry F Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), p.17.

equates this with marriage); an opportunity for women to take control; an acknowledgement of community. However, his comments are based on anecdote rather than research, and he himself suggests that further research is required. [65] Kenneth Stevenson, in reflecting upon an emergency baptism he performed as a deacon, suggests that fear, duty, and hope drive the requests for such baptisms. However, 'there is no point in having a slick and watertight 'theology of baptism' unless it meets the questions and the yearnings, and the fears and duties and hopes, of the people for whom these sacraments are designed, namely everyone.'[66] Here, Stevenson is acknowledging the multivocality of the rite.

Although little of it has been published, there is some research on why mothers bring their babies to baptism, which is from a church perspective. Of particular note is the work of Helen Sammon and Gill Hill. Sammon concludes that the Thanksgiving service, without its requirement for Christian commitment, could be used as an alternative to baptism, while still responding to families' expectations.[67] She uses Colin Buchanan's description of it as 'genuinely frontier provision.'[68] Gill Hill's research was with young single women on an estate in her parish. She concludes that the Church, and so, clergy, need to be more aware of the importance of the symbols of baptism, the wordiness of the rite, and the need for sensitive pastoral care which acknowledges the beliefs (however uninformed) of the parents who are seeking to have their children baptised.[69]

[65] Alan Billings, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts : the Role of the Church in a Time of No Religion* (London : SPCK, 2004).
[66] Kenneth Stevenson, *The Mystery of Baptism in the Anglican Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1998**),** p.88.
[67] Sammon, Helen, 'We want to get the baby done', (unpublished MA thesis, Birmingham University, 2010).
[68] Colin Buchanan, 'David Wright: What has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism' in *Evangelical Quarterly*, 78, (2006), 151-156.
[69] Gillian Hill's thesis is unpublished, although her research is summarised in 'Birthright or Misconception?' in *Presiding Like a Woman*, ed. by Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns (London: SPCK, 2010).

The experience of birth is an experience of liminality reflected in traditional theology of baptism: of death and new life: the font symbolises both tomb and womb.[70] I come to this research on baptism wondering what it means to women who have encountered the dangerous space between birth and death, or struggling to make sense of their new identity, who know that the gaze of the world is no longer upon them but upon their child. Turner's work which develops that of van Gennep is important here, exploring the nature of *liminality* and *communitas*.[71] The three main stages associated with the rite of passage described by Van Gennep are: Separation, Transition, Reincorporation. These may also be termed: separation, margin (limen) and aggregation or re-aggregation to the old.[72] Of these, 'the first and last speak for themselves; they detach ritual subjects from their old places in society and return them inwardly transformed and outwardly changed to new places.'[73]

The importance of ritual experience for meaning making seems to be universal although participation in social rituals, certainly those associated with established religion, is declining. David Power suggests that 'the difficulties that people experience today in negotiating the transitions inherent to any life, [are] because of the absence of social, cultural and religious coherence in the places where they belong.'[74] His comments reflect those of Peter McGrail as he describes the experience of First Communion in the Roman Catholic Church as 'ritual failure'.[75] I shall challenge McGrail's conclusion that the extreme dissonance experienced by the participants in the rite means, necessarily, that the ritual has 'failed'.

[70] This is discussed in Peter John Alan Robinson, *Baptism in Ritual Perspective : Myth, Symbol and Metaphor as Anthropological Foundations for a Baptismal Theology*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1997, pp.250-338. He quotes Cyril of Jerusalem, 'In one and the same action you died and were reborn; the water of salvation became both tomb and mother for you.'
[71] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1969).
[72] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B Vizedom and Gabrielle L Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977 [1960, 1909]).
[73] Victor Turner, 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality', in *Secular Ritual* ed. by Sally F Moore and Barbara G Myerhoff (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1977), p.36.
[74] David Power, 'The Ritual of Life-Passages: Whether or Not', *Concilium*, 5, (2007), 13-25, p.15.
[75] Peter McGrail, *First Communion: Ritual, Church and Popular Religious Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.167.

While exploring meaning, I also ask about the experience and expectation of motherhood. Adrienne Rich contrasted the *experience* of motherhood with the *institution* of motherhood: this theory is of significance when considering the performance of motherhood which may be observed at baptism and which I discuss in chapter 8.[76] Following Rich, there has been further relevant sociological and feminist writing on motherhood. Bev Skeggs who explored the social and personal meanings of motherhood for working class women, argues that respectability is a key motivator and social organiser.[77] I shall be exploring and developing Skeggs' work as I argue that it is also a key motivator for the mothers in this research.

2.2 Locating the Research within the Story of Infant Baptism

The dissonance expressed regarding infant baptism reflects that felt by clergy throughout church history. Clearly some of this discomfort reflects the view taken about the ritual purpose of baptism, and whether, as an act of initiation, it marks the baptisand's introduction to Christ and the community of faith, or whether it marks a more mature understanding of that faith and commitment to Christ. Does baptism instigate a change or is it a declaration of what we already are? The theological justification for or against infant baptism seems to flow between these stances.

There is no specific reference to the baptism of children or infants in the Bible itself and so there remains some uncertainty about the practice for the early church. There are references to entire households being baptised (Acts 16:15, 18:8, I Corinthians 1:16) but these are

[76] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born : Motherhood as Experience and Institution* 2nd edn. (New York: Norton, 1986 [1976]).
[77] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997).

inconclusive in terms of infant baptism. For those (and in particular David F Wright[78]) who wish to argue against infant baptism this inconclusivity seems to enable them to conclude that it was not practiced at all. However, I think that the biblical texts available mean, quite simply, that it would be dangerous to draw conclusions based on these alone.

It could be argued that it was the doctrine of original sin as formulated by Augustine which did most to shape the practice of infant baptism as we have it today. Although infant baptism was known in the centuries before Augustine and we know that it had been encouraged by Cyprian, before the time of Augustine there seems to be no consensus about how widely it was practised.[79] It was as a result of the Pelagian controversy that Augustine developed the concept of original sin: Augustine's reasoning was that the practice of baptism of infants (including the exorcism) indicates the infant's need of forgiveness from original sin: [80]

> But that sin alone which was contracted from our origin separates people from the kingdom of God. Even little ones who have died cannot enter that kingdom without having received the grace of Christ, as this person admits.[81]

This, then, created a demand for baptism to be 'quam primum' that is, as soon as possible after the birth, and this gradually became the norm (as infant mortality remained high[82]) rather than the exception. In case a child's life might be in danger, priests were required to perform baptisms as requested:

[78] David F Wright, *What has Infant Baptism done to Baptism?*, pp.32 – 37.
[79] Ferguson p.627/8, see also F. Hendrick Stander, and J.P. Louw, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Leeds: Carey Publications, 2004), p.16.
[80] Johnson, p.145.
[81] Augustine, *The Works of Augustine: a Translation for the Twenty-first Century: Answer to the Pelagians*, trans. by Roland J. Teske (New York: New York City Press, 1997), p.42.
[82] See Johnson, p.214.

> And if an unbaptised child is brought suddenly to the mass-priest……..he must baptise it immediately in haste, so that it doesn't die heathen.[83]

As Christendom spread in the West and as kings and so states became Christian, so baptism, as indication of loyalty to the king (or control by the king) became compulsory. In 785CE Charlemagne introduced fines for parents who did not have their child baptised within a year of its birth.[84]

During the Protestant Reformation the argument persisted and no theological clarity regarding infant baptism prevailed. Cranmer retained the practice in the first editions of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), arguing that baptism is a 'gift of the grace of God.'[85] So, the medieval rite remained virtually unchanged in the BCP. Johnson suggests that this might have been in response to the Anabaptists' objections. However, in 1662, the practice of infant baptism led to a divide between the Church of England and Dissenters. The Church challenged non-conformists and puritans who allowed only believers' baptism, declaring, 'Our Church concludes more charitably (than the Puritans) that Christ will favourably accept every infant to baptism'[86]

In the intervening years, the debate has continued, although Church of England canon law remains unchanged, 'a member of the clergy may not refuse to baptise a child living in his or

[83] Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c.20 – c.1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.138.
[84] Cramer, pp.185-6.
[85] Johnson, p.270.
[86] Referring to the Savoy Conference, 1662, Reginald Richardson Osborn, ***Forbid them Not: the Importance and the History of General Baptism*** **(**London: SPCK, 1972), p.17.

her parish who is brought to him or her for baptism, providing the legal requirements regarding prior notice and in relation to the godparents are complied with.'[87]

Registers of baptisms were kept in English churches from 1538 by an order of Thomas Cromwell.[88] From that time until 1834 when the registration of birth was introduced, this was the only means there was of recording the birth of a child and continued to assume that every baby born would be baptised. It was only in 1874 that the registration of a birth of a child became compulsory.[89] So, for much of the last five hundred years in England the baptism of a child was the only means of the child receiving a formal social identity. This social aspect of infant baptism is often ignored by those writing the history and theology of infant baptism, but suggests that it was a practice deeply embedded in the people's understanding of who they were.

In her guide to using the Common Worship service of baptism, Gilly Myers, a member of the Liturgical Commission, acknowledges the 'uneasiness' experienced by congregations as they realise the gulf between their expectations of infant baptism and those of the baptism families whom they do not know. [90] Myers here uses the category of 'outsiders' - those who do not attend church regularly, and sets them apart (and against) those who consider themselves to be members. It does appear that the Church of England's liturgists are increasingly objecting

[87] Canon B22, https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/canons/section-b.aspx#B22 [accessed 25/7/15]
[88] *The Story of the General Register Office and Its Origins from 1538 to 1937* **(**London: HMSO, 1937), 5.
[89] *The Story of the General Register Office.* p.5.
[90] Gilly Myers, *Initiation: a Practical Guide to the New Services,*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p.26.

to 'indiscriminate' baptism. In summing up the various reports[91] and new liturgies of the last fifty years, Bryan Spinks comments:

> However, behind all the rites can be seen a concern to make baptism part of public worship, emphasising that it is entrance into the body of Christ, the Church. There is a desire to stress that infant baptism is not simply an insurance against original sin and as a move, against indiscriminate baptism, the liturgy stresses the role and responsibility of parents godparents and the congregation.[92]

2.3 Locating the Language: Christening or Baptism?

The ethnographic method gives importance to the naming of phenomena. Anthropologists have traditionally spent considerable energy in finding out what words mean and how those words contribute to structures of meaning.[93] It would be easy for native speakers to assume a common semantic frame with other native speakers, but I would suggest that it is equally important to pay attention to the meaning of the words used. All the women I interviewed used the word 'christening' rather than 'baptism'. As young women, those I talked to in the first stage of the research used the word christening but as older church members, some of whom are actually baptism visitors, they realise the word used in church is 'baptism'. The question, then, of whether baptism means the same thing as christening is a pertinent one and one which, I think, reflects the complicated polysemy of the rite.

[91] There have been several church documents produced on the nature and integrity of infant baptism: The Ely report*: Christian Initiation: Birth and Growth in the Christian Society The Report of the Commission on Christian Initiation,* (London: Church House Publishing, 1971), The Lima document: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No.111*, (World Council of Churches, 1982), and the Church of England report *On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (Church House Publishing,1995).

[92] Bryan D Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: from Luther to Contemporary Practices*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[93] An example of this can be seen in Charlotte Hardman's study of the Lohoring Rai in Nepal. In chapter 8 in particular, she explores the words used to refer to emotions. *Other Worlds: Notions of Self and Emotion among the Lohorung Rai*, (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp.223 – 273.

The word 'christening' has its roots in the Old English word 'cristnen' which meant to be a catechumen, or to be dedicated to Christ,[94] but as the rites of christening and the catechumenate became one, it came to have the same meaning as baptism.[95] The word baptism derives from the Greek, entering English usage through the Latin liturgy. Spinks quotes a form of the rite from the fifteenth century in which both terms are used: 'I folowe (batize) the, or elles I crysteneþe'[96] The Old English word is followed by a Latin alternative. The use of both terms and languages together suggests that even in this early usage they did not quite mean the same thing, one being used more formally than the other.[97]

So, the word 'baptism' is the 'insider' word, in that it is part of an 'in-group' speech which, 'marks the professional and maintains solidarity.'[98] Bollinger suggests that such specialisms both reveal and maintain structures of power. I would suggest that for the 'in-group', in this instance the Church, the alternative word 'christening' has been stigmatised as being part of a 'folk' understanding of the rite and indicative, somehow, of insincerity.

I suggest that the two words mean different things: 'christening' is being used to refer to the cultural aspects of the rite which include the conferring of social identity: the party, presents, cards, and of course, dress whereas 'baptism' refers to only a small portion of that whole experience, and that is the liturgy performed at the font. I use both words in this thesis, reflecting the way the words have been used by the participants.

[94] Mark Searle, *Christening: the Making of Christians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1980), p.32.
[95] Bryan Spinks, p.28.
[96] Spinks p.150.
[97] Thomas Pyles and John Algeo, *The Origins and Development of the English Language* 3rd edn. (San Diego, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982 [1964]), pp.238-259.
[98] Dwight Bollinger, *Language the Loaded Weapon, the Use and Abuse of Language Today* (London: Longman, 1980), p.72.

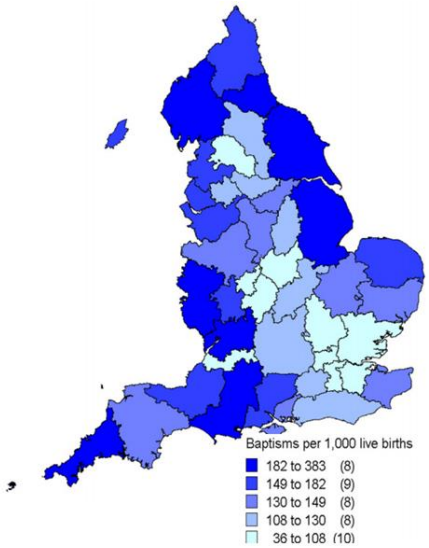
2.4 Locating the Research in the Church Setting

a) Baptisms in the Church of England

The Church of England records its figures for baptism through a system of parish returns sent to diocesan offices. For the first time in 2013 the returns asked for the numbers of baptisms to be split into two groups so the numbers of infant baptism (aged 1 – 4) and child baptisms (aged 5 -12) could be differentiated. In the period 2004 – 2013 there had been an overall decrease (by over 1,000) in the number of infant and child baptisms. 'Infant baptisms have fallen from 96,000 to 79,000 (a 17% decrease) while child baptisms have increased from 37,000 to 43,000 (15% increase).'[99]

Although the North East has some of the lowest take up of Christian pastoral offices as a whole as a percentage of its Christian population,[100] the demand for baptism remains high, as the following figure, taken from the statistics for mission document reveals.

Fig. 2.1 Proportion of Live Births Baptised into Church of England, 2013



[99] www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pdf, (accessed 7/5/15).
[100] www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pd, (accessed 7/5/15), p.52.

b) The Diocese of Durham

The area of the Diocese of Durham remained unchanged from the medieval period until the late nineteenth century, and covered most of the historic counties of Durham and Northumberland. The population movements in the North-East of England after 1800, along with numerous social, political and administrative pressures, resulted in changes in the diocesan organisation particularly during the second half of the century. By the 1870s diocesan reorganisation was being considered and in 1882 the diocese of Newcastle was established.[101]

Although one of the richest dioceses in the nineteenth century,[102] the Diocese of Durham is now one of the poorest.[103] It is ranked twelfth in the Church of England for its population of 1,471,000 and tenth for its Christian population of 1,031,000. With 272 churches, this means that the Christian population per church is 3,790. There were 4,990 baptism of infants and children in 2013 (again showing little change since 2009), with 260 Thanksgiving services.

30% of parishes in Durham Diocese are among the 10% most deprived parishes in the country. The most significant poverty-related issue is the relatively high rate of lone parenthood.[104] Across the Diocese there are significant differences in terms of poverty: *Communities Together* note that there is almost a twenty year difference in life expectancy for girls between certain parishes in Stockton and parishes in Durham.[105]

[101] The Diocese of Durham Archives: http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ead/ddr/ddrbioghist.xml#node.1.4.2.1 [accessed 25/9/15].
[102] Robert Lee, 'Class, Industrialisation and the Church of England: the Case of the Durham Diocese in the Nineteenth Century', *Past and Present,* 191:1, (2006), 165- 188, p.169.
[103] www.churchofengland.org/media/2048371/2012financestatistics.pdf 7/5/15. The income for 2012 in the Diocese was 10.4 million. This compares with Newcastle Diocese whose population is almost half that of Durham and whose income was 6.9 million. So, in terms of per capita income, it is ranked amongst the 10% most deprived in the country.
[104] http://www.cuf.org.uk/communities-together-durham, [accessed 7/5/15].
[105] http://www.cuf.org.uk/communities-together-durham, [accessed 7/5/15].

c) The Diocese of Newcastle

The Diocese of Newcastle was formed in 1882 from the Diocese of Durham when the Church of England recognised that the increasing populations needed to be served in different ways.[106] According to the Church of England statistics, in 2013 the population of Newcastle Diocese was 807,000 and the Christian population 509,000. With 237 churches, this meant that the Christian population per church was 2,150.[107] There were 2,140 infant and child baptisms in 2013 (this figure shows little change since 2009), and only 20 Thanksgiving services.[108]

Comprising rural Northumberland which is sparsely populated, the diocese is the least densely populated in the country with nine square miles per church. However, it also contains areas of urban deprivation. Its shares of economic output, jobs and household income fall below its share of the population. It has lower labour productivity. Life expectancy is shorter and average reported happiness is slightly lower than the rest of England. In data published in November 2014, Northumberland's Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head was similar to the English average, but above that of the rest of the North East, due in part to high earners choosing to live in more rural areas.[109]

d) The Parishes

I selected six Church of England parishes from across a spectrum of traditions to participate in the research. All of the parishes were in areas where there is at least some, and often

[106] Robert Lee, p.167.
[107] www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pdf [accessed 7/5/15].
[108] www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pdf [accessed 7/5/15].
[109] I am grateful to the Diocesan Secretary, Shane Waddle, for his help in accessing these figures. The document from which they were taken remains unpublished.

considerable, social deprivation following the decline of heavy industry in the previous decades. In this section I give a brief commentary on the social context of each of these parishes.[110]

i) St Aidan- vicar: Gary

The estimated population of the parish is 15,900.[111] The parish comprises a new town built in the 1960s which has private and public housing, some post-war estates and some Victorian housing built for miners. Although St Aidan's is quite a disparate parish, figures from the Church Urban Fund suggest that it ranks about midway on the table for factors of deprivation. For example, 24% of parishioners live in social housing; 14% of children live in poverty as do 17% of pensioners. This means that, although its ranking is average in the diocese, the parish ranks quite highly in terms of national deprivation. Neighbourhood statistics suggest that one third of the adult population is not in employment.[112] The church was built in the late nineteenth century. It describes itself as 'middle of the road' Anglican (although the incumbent describes himself as 'evangelical').

Average Congregation: 90 Baptisms last year: 38

ii) St Bede – vicar: Rob

There are approximately 9,100 people living in the parish, which is one of the most deprived parishes in both the country and the diocese (170 out of 175), with a child poverty rate of 47%.[113] Neighbourhood statistics suggest that 43% adults are not in employment.[114]

[110] Statistics, church history and referencing are restricted here in order to protect the anonymity of participants. Pseudonyms are used to refer to churches, places or people throughout this thesis.
[111] http://www.cuf.org.uk [accessed 16/02/13].
[112] 2,141 people out of a population o f 6,545. These are ward rather than parish statistics about d reveal a slightly higher percentage than across a wider area. http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk [accessed 16/02/13].
[113] http://www.cuf.org.uk [accessed 16/02/13].

Housing is mixed with mainly post-war housing built by the local authority, 52% of this is owner occupied.[115] The church was built in 1953 at about the same time as the housing. The church describes itself as part of the modern catholic tradition within the Church of England.[116]

Average Congregation: 38 Baptisms last year: 30

iii) St Cuthbert – vicar: Mark

St Cuthbert's building was started in the twelfth century, and retains its original features. The estimated population of the parish is 3,400, and the parish ranks highly in terms of social deprivation on some indices: 52% children and 39% pensioners live in poverty.[117] Only 18% of housing is owner-occupied and 32% adults are not in work.[118] Despite this, its central location suggests a vibrant and thriving context. Many of its congregation travel from elsewhere attracted by the advertised 'traditional values': that is, using BCP liturgy and not accepting women priests.

Average Congregation: 50 Baptisms last year: 25

iv) St Elfleda vicar: Helen

St Elfleda's church is a large church in a town which has suffered significant deprivation. It was built almost one hundred and fifty years ago, to serve a growing population in an area of heavy industry. The population of the parish is estimated at 14,700. It ranks among the 25% most deprived parishes in the country although mid-way on a diocesan level. 36% adults

[114] http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk [accessed 16/02/13].
[115] http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/statistics-and-census-information [accessed 16/02/13].
[116] http://www.achurchnearyou.com [accessed 18/02/13].
[117] http://www.cuf.org.uk [accessed 16/02/13].
[118] http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/statistics-and-census-information [accessed 16/02/13].

have no qualifications but only 18% live in social housing.[119] 34% adults are not in work.[120] However, there have been several large estates of new houses built in the past five years, which have begun to changed the social make-up of the town. It is moderate catholic in its traditions.

Average Sunday Congregation: 80 Baptisms last year: 46

v) St Ebba, vicar: Janet

St Ebba's was built about one hundred and seventy years ago to serve a mining and quarrying community. In the last 40 years local industries have died out completely and it has become part of urban sprawl. The population of the parish is estimated at around 8,500 and it ranks quite highly in terms of deprivation – among the 10% most deprived parishes in the country with child poverty at 31% and pensioner poverty at 29%. 46% adults are not in work. It describes itself as open evangelical.

Average Sunday congregation: 45 Baptisms last year: 27

vi) St Hilda, vicar: Sheila,

St Hilda's was built one hundred and fifty years ago to serve the people of a growing industrial centre. The parish has an estimated population of 12,500. It contains a wide range of residential areas and developments. These range from estates comprising social housing to modern middle class new-builds and privately owned residential estates, although 48% of the population live in social housing. It ranks highly in terms of deprivation – one of the 10% most deprived in the diocese and nationally with child poverty at 38% and 48% living in

[119] http://www.cuf.org.uk [accessed 16/02/13].
[120] http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination [accessed 16/02/13].

social housing.[121] 40% of the adult population are not in work.[122] It is liberal catholic in its tradition.

Average Sunday Congregation: 40 Baptisms last year: 20

2.5 Data Collection: The story of how I did the research

In the initial phase of the research, a combination of focus groups and conversation was used to begin to explore some of the issues around baptism for mothers. Focus groups are: 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research.'[123] As Gibbs highlights, one of the advantages of such groups is that they rely on interaction within the group about the topic, so are useful at the exploratory stage of the research, 'Focus groups can help to explore or generate hypotheses and develop questions or concepts for questionnaires and interview guides.'[124] I sought to build up a richness in my data, with the stories I heard contributing to a thick description which enabled me to design an appropriate questionnaire.[125]

The focus groups consisted of members of the Mothers' Union whose stated aim is to support marriage and family life,[126] and I wanted to explore the views of these women in relation to baptism. I approached the Mothers' Union by speaking at the annual meeting for branch leaders in Newcastle Diocese, I offered to speak to branches about baptism if they were to convene a related focus group. I met with three such focus groups for a wide-ranging and

[121] www.cuf.org.uk [accessed 16/02/13].
[122] www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination [accessed 16/02/13].
[123] R.A. Powell and H.M. Single, 'Focus groups', *International Journal of Quality in Health Care*,8:5, (1996), 499-504, p.499.
[124] Anita Gibbs, 'Focus Groups', *Social Research Update*, 19, (1997), http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU19.html [accessed 17/02/13].
[125] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), p.122.
[126] www.themothersunion.org [accessed 20/02/13].

open-ended discussion as I continued to seek clarification of what I thought I had been hearing as my research progressed.

At the same time, I also began to visit Mothers' Union groups across the diocese, where I presented my findings which were discussed and either affirmed or criticised by the women present. This part of the research tested the credibility of the research: 'credibility is crucial and…cannot be well established without recourse to the data sources themselves.'[127]

Also in this initial stage of the research I had conversations with individuals about why they had chosen to have their babies baptised. Some of these I met through church led toddler groups, and some through personal contacts. As this first stage of research ended I thought I had highlighted what seemed to me to be the main ways in which the meaning of baptism was understood by those mothers, and from these findings constructed the questionnaire to be used in the next phase of the research.

This questionnaire was intended to confirm and corroborate with previous findings more broadly across the parishes participating in the research, drawing out the stories and opinions of women who were both members of the congregations and mothers. I did pilot the questionnaire with a group of six women who completed it, then spent two hours discussing it with me, suggesting ways that the questions could be clarified and respondents encouraged to answer more fully. The advantage of using questionnaires was that I was able to explore the views and stories of a wider number of participants than would be possible through interview, and so to gauge the importance and meanings baptism had for these women and the language

[127] Y.S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, *Naturalistic Enquiry* (London: Sage, 1985), p.213.

used about it. It also meant that the respondents were completely anonymous. The disadvantage of it was that there was no opportunity for follow up questions. However, the many open questions which had been designed to elicit narrative meant that many of the women wrote long accounts on the white space of the questionnaire and one wrote a detailed letter.

I visited the parish churches of St Aidan, St Elfreda and St Ebba during their Sunday service to introduce the research and in order to recruit respondents. I also visited St Cuthbert's where I was able to approach individuals after the service. As I was not able to visit St Bede's, the vicar read out an introduction to the research which I had prepared. I attended St Hilda's for their midweek Eucharist where I spoke to the congregation, encouraging them to participate. When it had been possible, this personal introduction undoubtedly influenced the outcome of the research, but I felt that it might also have influenced the numbers of people participating.

I was also able to observe baptisms in all the parishes participating in the research and with all the priests who would be interviewed. All the baptisms I attended were not part of the main Sunday worship, so the congregations comprised people invited to the christening, forming an 'occasional congregation.'[128] I participated in these rituals only to the extent that I was present, in most I assisted the church warden in greeting guests at the entrance. In this way I was less obviously 'observing', but participating. I received copies of the liturgy used and observed how the ritual was performed.

[128] A term coined by Douglas Davies in 'Priests, Parish and People: Reconceiving a Relationship' in *Congregational Studies in the UK* ed. by Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting, and Linda Woodhead (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.153 – 169.

The third phase of the research was to talk to women who approached their local vicar requesting christening for their baby, about the meaning the rite held for them. I used the results of previous phases to identify lines of enquiry for the interviews, although I did not follow these prescriptively. Although I had intended to meet these mothers both before and after the baptism, this proved to be impossible either because of difficulties in contacting them in the first instance or because of their reluctance to meet with me again: so I interviewed them only once, either before or after the baptism.

I planned to interview eighteen women, both before and after the baptism, hoping to recruit three women in each of the six participating parishes. However I eventually interviewed only thirteen women who were recruited through a variety of means and only did one follow up interview. Most of the participating parishes, despite the initial enthusiasm of the clergy, did not put me in contact with mothers. On several occasions I made phone calls to follow up contacts passed on to me by the incumbent, but the person I spoke to was suspicious and unhelpful. I sent out reminders to parishes, but eventually made the decision to interview any mothers whom I had the opportunity to meet and for whom I did not have pastoral care. Most of these contacts were through clergy friends: a few came from a neighbouring parish which raised some ethical issues; one I met through a radio interview I did about baptism; one was passed on to me by an acquaintance. The interviews were digitally recorded and notes written immediately after the interview.

The final aspect of this phase of the research was to interview the parish priest. These interviews took place after the interviews with the mothers. Of course, one of the constraints of the research was that in order to brief the priests I had already had quite substantial

conversations with them about their views on baptism, so in the more formal interviews I covered much of the same ground. Although most of these were not actually the priests who conducted the baptisms for those whom I interviewed, I chose to stick to my research plan because of their connection with the churches from which questionnaires had been returned.

2.6 Interpreting the Data: Finding the Stories

When it came to the analysis it seemed to me that a great deal would be lost if I were just to use a computational tool. A key motivation for my research has been to honour the stories of mothers: an over dissecting approach might reveal a great deal about their content but less about their meaning. There is qualitative data analysis software available such as NVivo, and while this might offer more options for presentation, it still needs to be coded and interpreted with the danger that nodes might become separated and the individual stories disconnected. As I become immersed in the data, I chose not to use this software as I sought to develop a 'thick' description.[129] The process began, as in grounded theory, with the coding of data. These codes, as Byrne suggests, were formed in the light of the conceptual apparatus available to me as a practical theologian, and using 'in vivo' codes -deriving from language observed.[130] However, as I came to code the text produced by questionnaire responses and the interview transcripts, I could also draw on themes which had emerged from the pilot phase, and test their applicability. Byrne describes this process as 'developing concepts from the data and then searching through data to see if they hold up at all and, if they do, then what are the limits of their applicability.'[131]

[129] This is discussed by David Byrne, *Interpreting Quantitative Data* (London: Sage, 2002), p.149.
[130] Byrne, p.155.
[131] Byrne, p.148.

This coding was used to create categories, and the categories grouped together to develop themes which give an etic interpretation of the data. Wolcott argues that there are three important elements to a qualitative enquiry. These are description, analysis, and interpretation[132]. In the chapters which follow, I shall describe the data I have found, analyse it and, in chapter 6 and beyond, offer an interpretation. While these will not, in Byrne's words, establish 'universal laws': 'we can establish local accounts good within the spatio-temporal boundaries of the systems they describe.'[133]

However, I was aware that during the process of coding and revealing themes, even 'in vivo' ones, there was a danger that the stories of individuals might be lost. Feminist sociologist Bev Skeggs writes about her research among working class women as an account of 'power and legitimation.'[134] I considered that dissecting the stories given to me as I sought to find themes or commonalities would be a misuse of such power. This led me to the decision to write up the stories of the women and the clergy who I interviewed as profiles of individuals. This allowed me to pay attention to the stories of the women and the clergy who participated in the research. Skeggs describes experience as a 'thorny issue', marking 'a space where speaking and silencing are enacted.'[135] So, although experience may be difficult to unravel as it is constantly being formed and reformed, it remains important as the location of meaning. That experience is understood through attending to stories.[136]

In each of the profiles, I attend to the story as it has been given to me, describing each story as it is. In ethnographic terms, this means that my focus initially will be on the 'emic' as

[132] Harry F. Wolcott, *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, Interpretation* (Sage: London, 1994), pp.9 – 55.
[133] H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4th edn.. (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira, 2006), p.147.
[134] Skeggs, p.17.
[135] Skeggs, p.26.
[136] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 4th edn. (Columbia: Teachers College Press, 2013), p.122.

understood within the boundaries of the stories: that is, paying attention to the detail of the lived experience. The 'etic' locates that experience within a wider framework and it is that which I shall be addressing in later chapters. Although first used by Kenneth Pike,[137] Davies helpfully clarifies these terms:

> The emic view of life details the view held by people of themselves, while the etic perspective consists in theoretical models of their life constructed by anthropologists, who seek the underlying pattern of values, the ideological template upon which a society operates.[138]

Robert Stake, who wrote a key article about the case study method in the 1970s argues, however, that it is the 'emic' which is of more importance: themes and hypotheses remain subordinate to the understanding of the case.[139] He suggests that what is important is the understanding of meaning making and relationships rather than making generalisations. Stake quotes William Blake:

> To generalise is to be an idiot. To particularise is the lone distinction of merit. General knowledges are those that idiots possess.[140]

2.7 Ethical Issues

In accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Theology and Religion in the University of Durham, I was granted permission by the ethics board at each stage of the project before proceeding. Informed consent was obtained from every participant, except those who were completing questionnaires: these were anonymous and their consent was

[137] Kenneth Pike, 'Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior' in *Language and Thought: An Enduring Problem in Psychology*, ed. by Donald C. Hildum, (Princeton, N.J.: D Van Norstrand Company, 1967), 32-39.
[138] Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p.22.
[139] Robert E Stake, 'The Case Study Method in Social Enquiry', *Educational Research* 7:2 (1978), 5-8, p.6.
[140] Robert Stake, p.6.

assumed through their participation.[141] All participants were assured of confidentiality – and care was taken to treat everything participants told me with respect.

The majority of the face-to-face interviews took place in the participants' homes. This had advantages: there was no need for them to travel, they could manage their child care more easily, and they were in a place in which they felt comfortable. However, there are disadvantages in visiting participants' homes. Yee and Andrews point to the tensions between being a professional researcher and a 'good guest' and the 'unexpected ethical, emotional and methodological issues, for which there can be little preparation, and which cannot be covered by a professional code of conduct.'[142] Arweck and Nesbitt suggest that being in other people's personal spaces raises issues of power, with some loss of power by the field worker[143]. I considered this to be an advantage in my research, redressing some of the already unequal balance of power.

The question of the blurring of boundaries was a consideration in this study. This was a question of ethics separate to although reflecting issues of reflexivity. As a priest in Newcastle, I have served in several parishes and 'covered' for colleagues on holiday, so I am known to many of the congregations as a priest. I did not introduce myself as a priest, but as a student, and asked the clergy to do the same. Nevertheless, several of them did tell the participating mothers that I am ordained in order to legitimate my research and to allay their fears about who they would be talking to. However, during the course of the study I have had no pastoral care for the participants or within the parishes being studied.

[141] Copies of the letter given to participants at each stage, and the consent form, may be found in appendix 1.
[142] Wan Ching Yee and Jane Andrews, 'Professional Researcher or a 'Good Guest'? Ethical Dilemmas Involved in Researching Children and Families in the Home Setting' *Educational Review*, 8:4 (2006), 397-413, p.401.
[143] E. Arweck and E. Nesbitt, 'Young People's Identity Formation in Mixed-faith Families: Continuity or Discontinuity of Religious Traditions?', *Journal Of Contemporary Religion.* 25:1, (2010), 67 – 87.

There has also been a question of interviewing colleagues whose responses may be quoted in a negative light, or who may reveal their theology to be less orthodox than might be expected. However, although all names of people and places are being omitted from the study, it is still possible that people could be identified. There are few parishes which match the descriptions given, consequently anyone who had a good knowledge of the dioceses might be able to guess which parishes or clergy are being referred to. There has, then, been no promise of absolute anonymity, I could only promise to disguise the parishes as much as possible. Because all Durham theses are published electronically I could not, either, promise that details would be kept within the university community. One of the advantages of broadening out the geographical catchment of the study has been that such 'guessing' becomes harder – there are several cities and many once industrial areas where there is unemployment and deprivation.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have located my research in the literature and in the geographical contexts. In doing so, I have begun to examine the language used to refer to the rite – this is highlighted as a recurrent theme throughout the data, revealing the dissonance. In highlighting the importance of hearing the narratives of mothers, I have started to tell the story of the research: the methods I adopted, the decisions I have made and the challenges I have encountered.

In the chapters which follow, I continue the story of the research as I present my data findings from the initial stage and questionnaires, from the interviews or 'conversations' with mothers

and the clergy. In doing so, I seek, as I have indicated, to attend to the stories of individuals, of communities and of place which were shared with me.

Chapter Three: The Initial Study and Questionnaire

In this chapter I shall briefly discuss the themes which were highlighted during the initial phase of the research, and which provided a base from which my questionnaire was developed. I shall go on to summarise the responses to the questionnaire which had been sent out to participating parishes and completed by members of those congregations. Although in this chapter I shall not be offering an interpretation of the responses to the questionnaire, the description of the answers anticipates the thematic analysis which emerges from these responses, and relates them to the literature.

3.1 The Initial Phase of the Study

As I sought to consider the wide variety of understanding of baptism between the Church and mothers, I began with a group of mothers from different backgrounds, whose experiences of baptism would allow me some understanding of the meanings and issues in order to develop some research questions. This was the initial stage of the research: I talked to mothers, some of whom were church members, others on the edges, and others who attended church only occasionally, about how they understood their child's christening, and how they understood the christenings happening in their churches now. I had anticipated that in this phase, women inside and on the edge of church communities would give differing answers. However, although the 'insiders' were able to reflect on current practice and policy within their churches, the conversations about their experiences of baptisms highlighted similar concerns.

The purpose of this initial study was to begin to explore the meaning of baptism with mothers: listening sufficiently to establish themes which could be developed into questions for use as the research progressed. The value of this study was in generating avenues for

further research, 'framing questions, collecting background information, adapting a research approach.'[144] Here I shall describe the highlights of these conversations and the themes which I identified. Names of people and places have been changed to pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. As I describe these themes I use 'in vivo' terms; that is, words which have been used by the respondents themselves.

3.1.a Christening or Baptism?

In one of my first conversations with a group of mothers, I realised that although I had been using the words 'Baptism' and 'Christening' as synonyms, this was not necessarily how they were understood. Vera, an elderly Mothers' Union member, commented: 'We never used to call it baptism, we called it christening and tea afterwards. Do they mean different things?' As the conversation in the group developed, the women realised that as they had become more committed to church the language they were using had changed so instead of referring to christening, they had begun to refer to 'baptism'. Nevertheless, most of those with whom I talked (including those who represented the church) called the rite 'christening' although many used the terms interchangeably. However, Vera's question, which at the time I had dismissed, reflects the complicated polysemy of the rite.

3.1.b The Tea Afterwards

Many of the older women described 'the tea' after the christening as if it were part of the ritual – this often took place in their mother's home, but if not, their mother helped in its preparation. None of the women at this stage of the study had used caterers, and one woman, who was unmarried, had a party in the local club as her celebration. Most of those church

[144] Helen Sampson, 'Navigating the waves: the Usefulness of a Pilot in Qualitative Research' *Qualitative Research* vol.4:3, (2004),383–402. (accessed 22/6/15).

members now commenting on how things had changed, referred to baptism parties in their churches which felt so big that they swamped the usual Sunday morning congregation. Many of these women expressed negative emotions about this – they were both angry and disappointed that the guests did not seem to be taking their liturgies seriously.

> 'The parents are a bit self-conscious, but they're committed to it, the problems arise when they bring a million other people in who are there for the party, the disco night out, the high heels and they come in the middle of winter with all their stuff they'd wear down the Bigg Market.'

Margaret told me a story about how a visiting family sitting in the pew in front of her had felt slightly hungry during the Eucharist and begun to eat the sandwiches they had brought for lunch. She was a bit regretful that she had been unable to hold her tongue, although she did reprimand them for their disrespectful behaviour.

The way the baptism is celebrated – also part of the ritual if not the liturgy – seems then to have changed and thus has become a locus for the dissonance experienced. Families bring a large number of guests who are not always attentive to the service, and do not connect with the 'Church', then have a party in a local venue which is far removed from the 'tea afterwards' which was described by the older women from their own experience. The standard of dress which was much more revealing than most of the women I talked to in the initial phase were used to or found appropriate, also gave rise to some concerns.

3.1.c The 'Piece' or Amiss

Many of the older women told me about a tradition that I had never encountered and which they had trouble naming: some thought it could have been called the 'amiss' or they referred to it as the 'piece' or 'bread and cheese'. This seems to have been a widespread practice although with local variations. On the way to church for the baptism (or sometimes when leaving church) the first child of the opposite sex to the baby whom they met would be given a packet which contained some silver, a teacake (the variations were: scone, fruit cake, bread) and cheese. Although most of the younger women I talked to had not heard of this tradition, the grandmothers I was talking to were encouraging the tradition for their grandchildren.

3.1.d The Dress

From the earliest stages of the research, it was clear that the christening gown was very important. Most of the mothers still had the robe themselves or knew where it was kept in the family. Those who did not had lost it after lending it to a family member. If a family gown was not used, then they would usually choose to dress the baby in a robe made by a family member or friend.

Jean, who had not seen her son, now living in Australia, for more than twenty years, said that he was, 'baptised in a winceyette nightdress.' This was of great amusement to her – that he should have been wearing something so mundane. Despite its ordinariness, she had still kept it.

Jenny, whom I met at a toddler group, told me how the ancient family robe had fallen apart as she unwrapped it, so she had replaced it, as closely as she could. One woman aged ninety

nine told me with pride that her great great granddaughter was about to be christened in the robe that she and her brothers had worn.

3.1.e Gratitude

Most of the women, even those non-church members, acknowledged a sense of gratitude for their child and wanted to express that during the service. Patricia said, 'I was very grateful to have him and I suppose that gratitude was to God.' Those women who were baptism visitors also thought that thanksgiving was important for the mothers whom they met, 'The majority of them do acknowledge that there's a lot to be thankful for.'

3.1.f Churching

Some of the women I talked to referred to the BCP liturgy, 'Thanksgiving for the Safe Delivery of a Woman after Childbirth, Commonly Known as Churching'. The stories about their experiences of churching varied between those who found the whole experience demeaning and others who experienced it as an opportunity to express their gratitude to God:

> 'I regard it as superstitious nonsense I'm afraid – it's the way people talk about it – you can't get into my house until you've been churched. You're unclean and the wording of the BCP is awful'.

> 'My feeling is that childbirth is still quite dangerous. I found churching was nothing more than I would have put in my own prayers. It was lovely, it was held with sensitivity and he knew me well enough'.

For many of the women in this phase, churching was precursor to baptism- part of a necessary process in order for them and their child to be admitted to church and to society.

3.1.g The Family

As one grandmother explained to me that all her family, children and grandchildren, had been baptised, she said, 'We don't believe in religion but we do believe in baptism.' The rite of baptism, then, seemed to be key to this family's sense of identity. It also became clear that the presence of the wider family as guests was very important to all those I spoke to. Even after many years, and even when they could not longer remember who had attended, some mothers could still remember those who had been missing from this family occasion.

Some of the women, now grandmothers, expressed disappointment that their grandchildren had not all been baptised. Some blamed what they perceived as rigidity in church rules, others observed that their children had busy lives or had married people for whom baptism had no significance. All of those I asked said that they would not pressurise their children into having their children baptised, although two admitted that the weight of expectation might be interpreted as pressure.

3.1.h The New Wedding

In the conversations, several women observed that the mothers and families coming to baptism now wanted to have a 'new wedding'. Baptism visitor, Pat, was more nuanced:

> 'I mean I don't think they actually see it as a wedding, but I think it's a way of confirming that these people are a couple and they are going to have the big party with the couple and it sort of confirms things.'

Although this was the 'insider' view, it was not generally echoed by those who were on the edges of church whose focus was on the baby. Only Sharon suggested that she believed this

ritual was the closest (as an unmarried mother fifty years ago) she would ever get to a wedding.

3.1.i Part of the Church

For many of the women I talked to in this phase of the research, the importance of baptism was that it enabled their child to become a member of the church. 'Having my baby baptised meant he belonged to my faith. I suppose the first step whatever part of a greater faith. Part of the church.' This was more clearly articulated by those who had themselves been committed church members for a long time. When I asked why they had brought babies to baptism, Pat, now a church attender, answered, 'Because the church is in me – even though we didn't go.' It is this attachment which would suggest belonging. Jenny said, 'I think it makes them part of the church family and a formal member.'

3.1.j Blessing

Many of the women in addition to giving thanks for their child, wanted her to be assured of God's blessing. Pat recounted an occasion when, in visiting a family (A) whose baby was due to be baptised told them about the baby of the other family who would be baptised at the same service , describing her as 'very precious' because her life had been in jeopardy at the time of the birth. The response of family A was to explain the difficulties they had also experienced during pregnancy with their child who was, then, also very precious. Pat reflected, 'I thought I'll have to watch what I say, 'cos every one of these babies is precious and that's why they're doing this.' Another woman observed, 'If I hadn't had them baptised I would have felt as though I hadn't done my best for them. Is that stupid? You know, as though I hadn't given them every opportunity really.'

3.1.k Godparents

During one of the first group conversations, a young woman told me how a family row had erupted because she had refused to ask her atheist brother to be godfather despite her mother's insistence: 'I think my mum wanted completely family to be godparents whereas I think it's a fine balance. But my mum thinks it should be completely family.' As this conversation continued, another participant observed, 'if the parents get killed they [the godparents] get the children, like a second parent's role.' This conversation indicated how important the selection of godparents is. Among all the participants in this initial stage, there was some conversation about godparents, all highlighting how important the choice of godparents is, and how problematic the necessity of their being baptised can be for those making that choice.

3.1.l Superstitions

Several women recounted that neighbours or relatives would not allow them to visit until the baby was baptised. Joan told me, 'My mum said that when I was eight weeks old my Dad's family would leave me out in the cold on the doorstep because I hadn't been baptised.' Some observed that this reflected a disappointing level of superstition surrounding the rites of baptism.

Other elements which were discussed by the women and which might be considered (or dismissed) as superstitious was the belief that an unbaptised child who dies would be condemned to somewhere which was not heaven. A Mothers' Union member who had been a midwife told me, 'these tiny fragile babies born really early but were alive, the mothers were saying, I want him to go to Jesus, I don't want him to be a little lost soul everywhere.'

These brief summaries do little justice to the richness of data I collected in this phase from people I knew to those I met at toddler groups and through the Mothers' Union. Church members were delighted to tell me about their annoyance with present arrangements while recognising the need for their churches to grow and those outside the church wanted to tell me about a significant rite of passage which made a difference for them. While acknowledging the pain of these often elderly church members who felt taken for granted, I was also touched by the significance of the event for non church members, particularly those I met who were planning for the day through choosing a venue, inviting guests, preparing food, and dressing themselves and their child appropriately. They were not taking anything for granted. And so the dissonance becomes more pronounced and more polarised.

More importantly, the purpose of the initial phase of the research was to indicate themes, as I sought to understand the issues around baptism for mothers and churches. It was these on which I based my questionnaire, which included questions about tradition, the nature of the liturgy, the gathering of family, the language used, the choosing of godparents, the clothes worn , aspects of the rite of passage. However, many of the respondents in this phase were elderly so looking back on their child's christening from some distance.

3.2 The Questionnaire Results

Fifty six questionnaires were returned from the six parishes - although altogether one hundred and four were taken.[145] I had produced thirty copies of the questionnaire for each of the six churches participating. Although only a small number of questionnaires were returned, the stories they contain hold description, details and emotion which help to 'thicken' my

[145] A copy of the questionnaire can be found in appendix 2.

understanding of how mothers make meaning in baptism. Here I shall describe the responses from each church and give a brief overview of each answer. The findings described here will be developed and interpreted in chapter seven as I explore themes. Each returned questionnaire was given a reference code based on the name of the church.

As described above, during the initial phase I had highlighted some themes which seemed important and those which led to conflict, these had been referred to in the development of the questionnaire. Although some of the questions were straightforward to answer, there were opportunities for more detailed responses: the level of detail given suggests that many of the respondents had considered their answers carefully. Two of the questionnaires were only partially completed, with most questions unanswered. Nevertheless, I have included these in my description as they were both for churches where the overall return of the questionnaire was low. The first two questions included personal details about work and age (of mother and child); the summaries of these answers along with the summary of information about returns can be found in appendix 3.

3.2a The Questionnaire Part One

Question 3: The Clergy

Only one respondent said that there had been a female priest at the christening (in 1984), the others were all male. They all replied that it did not make any difference to them. Most did not specify that they had chosen any priest in particular for this rite: for the three who did, it had been a priest they knew well.

Questions 4 & 5: The Preparation

Eighteen of the mothers responding had received some formal preparation for the christening; these were spread chronologically and geographically. For those who did have preparation, three were with other families, three referred to 'Churching' as preparation and the others referred to a conversation with their priest. Five reported that they had a rehearsal in church.

Questions 6 & 7: The Service

Only twenty one reported that the baptism took place during the main Sunday service. Of the others who commented, six said that the baptism was immediately after the morning service, one that it was during evensong, and the others that it was in the afternoon.

Eighteen women said that other babies had been baptised at the same time as theirs. Only one replied that this had been an issue for her, but gave no detail.

Question 8: Guests

The answers do show an increase in the number of guests through time, although the number of recent christenings represented here is very small.

Fig 3.1 The Number of Guests

Decade	Number of Guests	Average attendance
1950s	6 - 25	12
1960s	10 - 30	19
1970s	2 – 35	14
1980s	6 – 20	16
1990s	14 – 80	36
2000s	20 - 50	35

Question 9: Clothes

Forty nine of the babies christened wore some kind of gown or dress. Of these, thirty three mothers said that they still have it and were able to say where it was kept. 'It is kept in our home preserved with care and awaiting the next baptism in our family.'[146] Fifteen specified that it was a family robe but the others did not specify. Five answers reported that the mother, or a relative, had made the dress, two of these out of a wedding dress. One said that that baby had also worn her wedding veil.[147] The respondents whose children were baptised more recently (in the last thirty years) reported that their child wore something other than the gown.

[146] Elf7.
[147] Aid14.

Question 10: Approaching and Meeting the Vicar

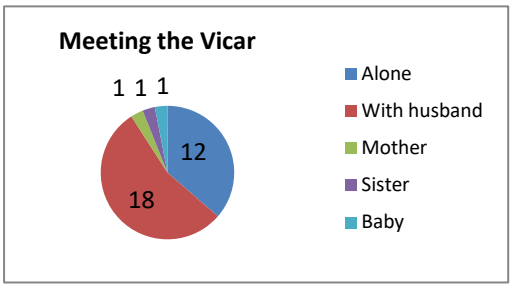


Figure 3.2 Meeting the Vicar

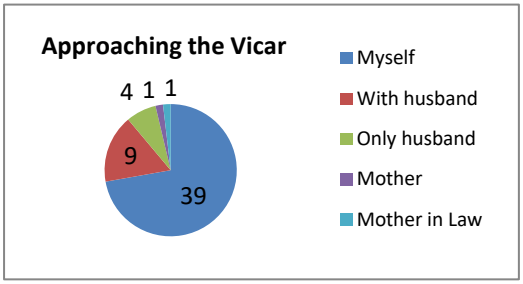


Figure 3.3 Approaching the Vicar

Most of the respondents said that they had made the initial approach to the vicar themselves – although in four instances the husband had done this. However, when it came to meeting the vicar, almost two thirds of those women had been accompanied. The one woman who specified that she was accompanied by the baby was a single mother.

Question 11: Godparents

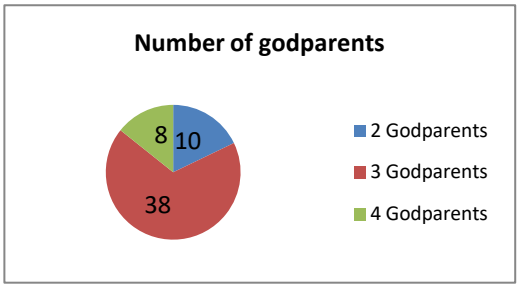


Figure 3.4 The Number of Godparents

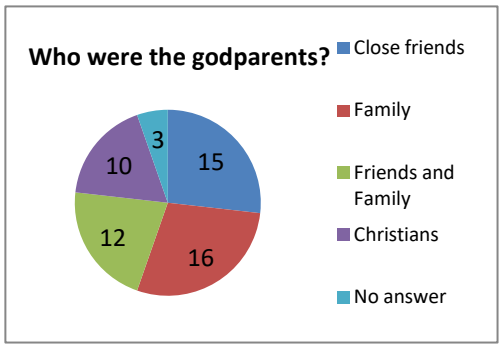


Fig. 3.5: The choice of godparents

Most respondents had three godparents, those who had only two (the minimum allowed by canon law) all had their christening before 1975. However, those who had four were spread over the time span of the responses. Parents chose godparents from among family and friends. Often close, trusted friends and relatives were chosen so they would:

> 'play a big part in our son's life'[148]
>
> 'take their duties as godparents seriously.'[149]
>
> 'Child's two aunties, a very good friend who would all be trusted to look after her if necessary.'[150]

Most replied that they would not choose godparents differently (Q11c), with one commenting:

> 'Probably not. At the time they seemed the best choice and although I might not choose the same again now, it was a good decision back then'.[151]

However, eight did suggest that they might not choose the same ones:

> 'Yes – neither bothered after a few years.'[152]
>
> 'Yes – thinking about it now I would prefer them to be Christian, even though I did not go to church at the time or have much of a faith. I think

[148] Aid4.
[149] Hild6.
[150] Aid1.
[151] Elf7.
[152] Ebb5.

having friends for godparents is tricky because people move on so my daughter does not know one of her godparents.'[153]

Question 12: The Party

There was only respondent who had no party –she was unmarried and had a small christening with only her parents present. All the other respondents had a party afterwards. Usually, the party was at home or at the home of parents although three had it in a hall and four in a venue (a restaurant or hotel), these had the most guests and had happened most recently. The number of guests at home varied from two – thirty, whereas in a hall or other venue thirty – ninety. The food was mainly prepared by 'me!', 'myself and my mother' (or another family member), only two brought in caterers. Most described it as party food or afternoon 'proper' tea. Forty-eight replied that they had a special cake, mainly made by a family member.

Question 13: The Presents

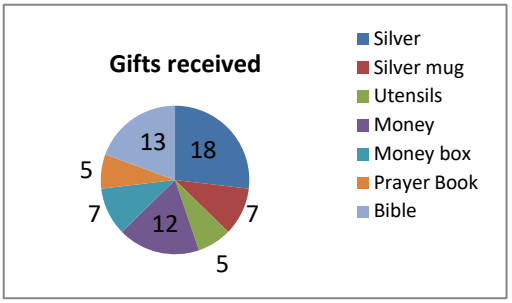


Fig. 3.6: Gifts Received

Only three respondents answered that their child had not received gifts. Three answered 'Don't know' and two did not answer the question. Of the others, most specified that that gifts were given by godparents in particular.

[153] Aid1.

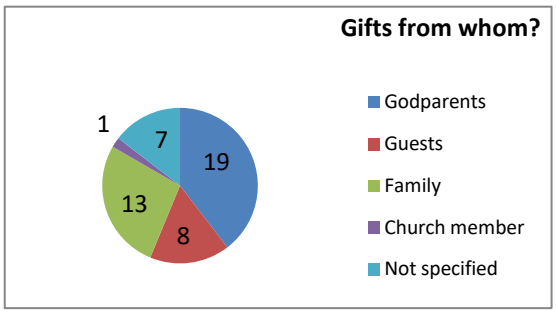


Fig. 3.7 Who were the gifts from?

Thirty seven said that they or their son or daughter had kept at least some presents, with two even specifying where they are now. Most of the children baptised received at least one item which was of monetary value – either money or something made of silver. Only sixteen received something 'religious' in the form of a bible or book of prayers.

Question 14: Traditions

The tradition most commonly reported by the women was the 'amiss' or some variation of it:

> 'When we came out of church we gave a piece of cake and a coin to the first person we saw of the opposite sex to the baby (old local superstition to bring the baby luck.) When we visited an old lady for tea the first time after the baptism the daughter was given an amass gift –a paper bag containing a piece of bread, some salt and an egg. The bread of life. The salt of the earth. A symbol of resurrection.'[154]

> 'We also did the first male we seen the cheesey bread.'[155]

Three mentioned that the tradition they liked was connected with the godparents: the tradition of the godfather carrying the baby into church and the godmother carrying it out.[156] One set of parents were also the godparents, 'who better to introduce the wonderful story of the Lord.'[157]

[154] Hild3.
[155] Ebb7 (1993).
[156] Hild8.
[157] Ebb5.

Four mentioned some aspect of faith as being part of the special tradition: 'we were thanking God for the baby's safe arrival and he was becoming a member of our church.'[158] Others referred to elements of the symbolic action of the liturgy:

> 'I think the signing of the cross on the child's brow was one of those things that sticks in the memory.'[159]

Three mentioned being given a lit candle. These three christenings had all been in the 1970s when the church was re-introducing the symbol of the candle into the baptism liturgy.

Two said that the top tier of the wedding cake was used for the christening.

Two mentioned Churching: 'Mothers had to be churched.'[160]

Question 15: The Candle

Twenty seven of the women were given a candle at the christening – almost all of these after 1974. Of these, twenty had kept their candle and six had lit it again.

[158] Ebb13.
[159] Ebb7.
[160] Elf11.

Question 16: What difference did it make?

The answers to the three sections of this question reveal similar themes.

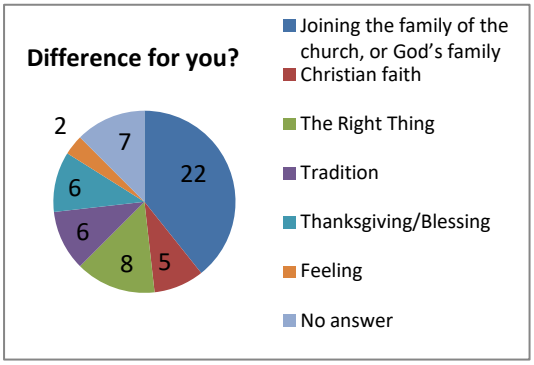


Fig. 3.8: The Difference Christening made for the Mother

For you?

For twenty two of the women, it was important to them because it meant that their child had joined 'God's Family' or become a member of the church. For fourteen it was because it was the 'right thing' or 'Tradition'.

Only two expressed the importance in terms of emotion.

> 'I felt like it was the right thing to do both for myself and for the baby.'[161]

> 'To thank God for a safe delivery and to have my children blessed in church.'[162]

For Your Child?

Although twenty people did not answer this question, most who did expressed their answer in terms of belonging –to God or to the Church. For some this was also expressed in spiritual terms.

[161]Hild2.
[162]Elf10.

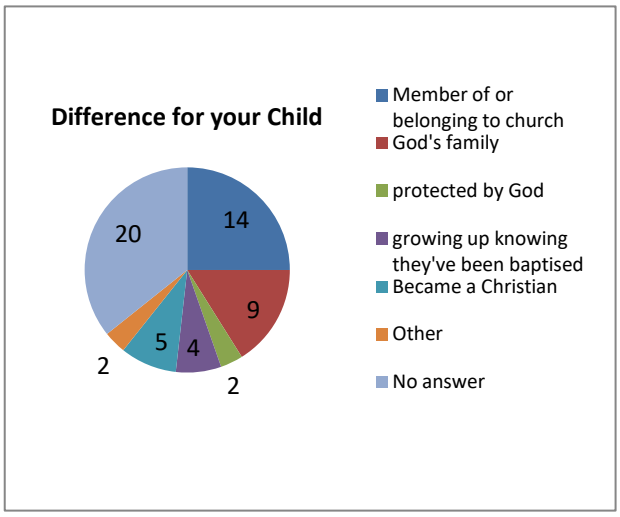


Fig. 3.9: The Difference Christening made for the Child

Others saw membership of the church as of more practical use:

> 'To give them choices in the future to enable them to be married in the church and also a choice to be confirmed if they want to be later.'[163]

Although several expressed regret that their children had not attended church as adults, they felt that baptism had given them a choice:

> 'Them know it was done. But may go a different path.'[164]

For Family?

Of the thirty two people who answered this question, nineteen said that for their family, there was an element of expectation that they would bring their child to be baptised. There was also a sense of the importance of the family coming together in order to celebrate the child:

> 'It was important for the family to keep up with the family tradition.'[165]

> 'A celebration of the whole family to give thanks for this child.'[166]

[163] Aid8.
[164] Ebba12.
[165] Elf8.

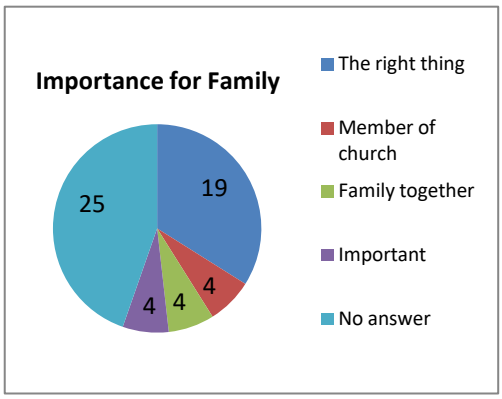


Fig. 3.10: The Difference Christening Made for the Family

Question 17: What was special about the whole day?

'The Sun Shone. Everyone involved took promises and meant to keep them.'[167]

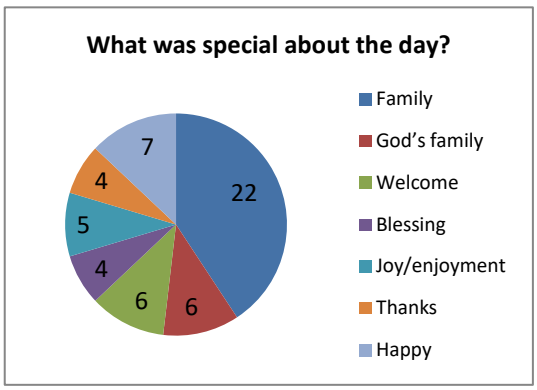


Figure 3.11: What was Special about the Day?

Only six people failed to respond to the question, and those who did answer responded positively. As the above quote demonstrates, for some it was a day of anticipating the future with hope, 'a good start.'[168]

For others it was about thanksgiving and blessing:

'joyful day, blessing our child and rejoicing that our child was born safe and healthy.'[169]

[166] Elf5.
[167] Hild2.
[168] Aid16.
[169] Aid8.

Some commented that the presence of their family to celebrate and witness also made the day special:

> 'Bringing my children into the church and all my family being there.'[170]

There was a sense of handing down something to the next generation:

> 'The fact that we were continuing this wonderful tradition to the next generation. We enjoyed it all.' [171]

Question 18: Disappointment

Most respondents did not answer the question. For those who did respond, the disappointments were about those members of the family who could not attend, or about photographs being lost. However there were two which referred to the vicar:

> 'Yes, the vicar didn't have time to have a photograph with the baby.'[172]

> 'The vicar asked where the father was which was embarrassing. All I could say was that he wasn't coming.'[173]

Question 19: Further Contact with the Church

For many of the mothers, contact with the church continued after the baptism as normal, although some expressed that they, and for one her husband, made a new commitment to church life, by attending more regularly or becoming more involved. However, for those who were not attending church regularly at the time, the other forms of contact were important. One family had kept the baptism anniversary cards which had been sent.

[170] Elf6.
[171] Elf7.
[172] Elf8.
[173] Elf9.

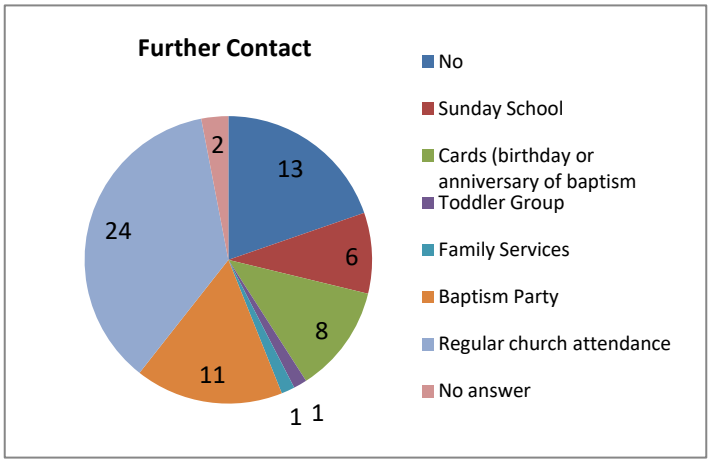


Fig. 3.12: Means of Contact with the Church after the Christening

Question 20: Would you change anything?

Many respondents answered, 'No' to this question. However, there were some exceptions. Two of the mothers replied that they would change the godparents: two, that they would have preferred to have the service in the main Sunday morning worship; one said she would have preferred not to have to manage a small child during the main Sunday morning worship so would have liked it at another time; and one made this comment:

> 'I would have liked to have had more knowledge about the service and the church. I would have liked to go to church back then but had no one to go with. I was quite shy when I was younger.'[174]

Question 21: The Baptism of Other Children

This question provoked some in-depth answers which revealed a great deal about the mothers and how they understood baptism. Many elements of the baptisms were the same, although many found the occasion to be more relaxed and there were fewer guests. There were two stories which I shall recount here:

> 'When it came to the baptism of my second child (a son) the parish vicar would not agree to my choice of godparents (who were Christian but not C

[174] Aid1.

> of E) so our son was not baptised neither was our next child (a daughter). We moved shortly after to N and when I asked the local vicar about their baptism he suggested I wait until it was time for their confirmation. Our daughter was baptised the day before her confirmation in c1984 with the rest of the confirmation class acting as sponsors. Only the vicar and the other candidates were present (at her request - no parents or relatives) and they had cake and soft drinks after. Our son has never been baptised. He did not want to be confirmed.'[175]

> 'My son was baptised at St Jude's in a service after the main church service on Sunday 6th September 1970. He had been born on June 25th and been very ill - it was thought that he might not survive. This was a very small party - immediate, close family, with no sense of celebration.'[176]

3.2b The Questionnaire Part Two

In this part, the respondents were asked more general questions relating to attitudes and on their experience as a member of the congregation rather than about their experience of the baptism of their own child.

Question 1:What do you think about your Church's attitude to people who come for baptism?

This question invited respondents to comment on their own church's attitudes towards those coming for baptism. Many of the mothers said that their church was 'very welcoming' without giving further detail. On the whole, and across all the churches, there was an expression of disappointment and regret that despite the efforts they made, there appeared to be little reward for this effort. One comment suggested that the reality of this welcome is less than these answers suggest:

[175] Hild3.
[176] Hild6.

> ‘Our church welcomes new people but when we went to church to enquire about our first child’s baptism not one person spoke to my husband or me during or after the service.’[177]

These answers all reflect the discomfort experienced by congregations who understand (and some have articulated this clearly) the need to welcome and yet are disillusioned as they consider their welcome (and perhaps also their church and its liturgy) to be treated with disrespect.

> ‘I think the church should welcome everyone who comes for baptism. Also, I think people coming should have some basic instruction nothing formal just a chat to try and establish links that might develop.’[178]

> ‘Personally, I think that my church accepts anyone for baptism, but very few are then seen again.’[179]

> ‘There is a degree of animosity towards people who are perceived as using the christening service as a party and many choose not to attend church on baptism Sunday. Although I appreciate this, I believe we should welcome all children brought to baptism.’[180]

> ‘After a lot of thought, I agree that the church should accept children for baptism even if the family are not regular churchgoers and even if it seems unlikely the family will attend again. It is a point of contact between church and community.’[181]

Question 2: Any Changes in the Service?

Although the answers from across the research reflect similar themes, here I shall refer to each church separately as the responses seem to reflect each church’s culture and capacity to change.

[177] Ebba12.
[178] Hild3.
[179] Elf8.
[180] Aid11.
[181] Ebba14.

St Hilda

Although one respondent said she had not seen changes, the others talked about them positively:

> 'The ones more recently are more personal and more thoughtful.'[182]

> 'Yes. A lot more personal and family involvement.'[183]

St Elfleda

In response to this question, many referred to the large number of guests and the lack of respect or even rudeness among them:

> 'The service is not revered by those who attend baptisms.'[184]

> 'These days it's about the party and although parents and godparents appear to engage with the service, many of the 'huge numbers' of guests are completely disinterested and some are rude.'[185]

However, there were also some comments that the liturgy was 'very simple' had 'more interaction' and included 'the lighting of candles'. However, there was one comment which suggested that the tone and shape of the liturgy had changed.

> 'Most baptism services have been basically the same, however, some seem to lack a sense of reverence and respect. We prefer a more traditional service, over the dumbed down version (such as excluding the apostles creed and lots of joking around).'[186]

[182] Hild1.
[183] Hild8.
[184] Elf10.
[185] Elf9.
[186] Elf7.

St Aidan

There had been a change in baptism policy when the new vicar arrived; the answers given here contradict each other about how baptisms happen, suggesting that some respondents do not know. Many mention that the number of guests has increased and there is an increasing emphasis on the party:

> 'Many who come are noisy and are there for the party afterwards. We rarely see the families again.'[187]

The sense of disconnect is expressed clearly by this respondent:

> 'no comment. Not been to one for some time.'[188]

St Bede

The answers from St Bede's are less detailed, some replying that there had been no change, others that there had, 'service is friendlier and more personal now.'[189]

St Cuthbert

There were only two returns from St Cuthbert's. These comments were:

> 'So this language has changed, also I am pleased the churching ceremony for mothers no longer takes place.'[190]

> 'Most of them are done in the service.'[191]

[187] Aid7.
[188] Aid4.
[189] Bede5.
[190] Cuth1.
[191] Cuth2.

St Ebba

Only one person answered 'No' to this question and commented that 'a candle is given now'.

Some mentioned the tone of the service changing:

> 'more relaxed and happy'[192];

> 'The vicar has shown child to congregation. Walked up and down a while. Possibly a few jokes about a motley lot.'[193]

> 'Everything is not so formal and starchy.'[194]

Some commented on the size of the baptism party many were neutral but others more negative:

> 'Many more family members and friends seem to attend but they do not seem particularly interested in the service and do not seem to participate in the service fully.'[195]

Question 3: Symbols

The responses about symbols were wide-ranging. The material symbols of baptism, as taught by the church, are clearly very important, although others were mentioned- white gown, shell, the Bible (this seems to be particular to St Aidan's). However, most mentioned the sign of the cross – fifteen, the water- eighteen, the candle – twelve, and only three mentioned the oil. Ebba8 also mentioned receiving cards from the church on the anniversary of the baptism. Only two responses offered an explanation of that symbolism:

> 'The lighted candle is a symbol of hope.'[196]

[192] Ebb12.
[193] Ebb3.
[194] Ebb11.
[195] Ebb8.
[196] Ebb8.

> ‘The dove, symbolising the Holy Spirit as well as fire. The sign of the cross, the words spoken over the water. A shell to pour the water over the head. The white gown, and cloth used to wipe the water. Water for washing, fire for spirit. Baptismal candle.’[197]

Many respondents answered this question with reference to symbolic action, things that were done during the ritual and which were meaningful. Many referred to the pouring of water at the font or the application of this water. Also important was the signing of the cross, the lighting of the candle. For others, the welcome of the baby into the church was important and some suggested that this was expressed as the vicar walked through the church carrying the baby.

> ‘The priest marking the sign of the cross on baby’s head and giving him/her their name and then walking down the aisle to show baby to the Church Family.’[198]

> ‘Parents and godparents went up to chancel steps and he made the sign of the cross on baby's head with oil, then other members did the same. Going to the font, lighting candles, giving the New Testament to the baby.’[199]

The responses to this question also suggest the importance of the words used. These words were performative: giving a name officially, making promises, blessing, welcoming, pledging to raise the child with a Christian belief; parents and godparents making a commitment.

Nineteen respondents referred to welcome or admission into the Christian church or into God’s family. Only two mentioned directly that it was about becoming a Christian. Several mentioned being ‘accepted’ into the church, into the family of God or into God’s kingdom.

[197] Elf7.
[198] Elf12.
[199] Aid2.

Question 4: Non-Religious Service

Only Four respondents answered yes to this question, and of those most thought there was something important missing from these services although there were elements of similarity.

> 'Very similar except no water involved and it was called a naming ceremony and the child was given a spirit name in addition to any first names.'[200]

> 'Very different. They hired a room in a pub, had readings from books and poems: they had sponsors, two aunties, one male friend.'[201]

Question 5: Baptism or Christening?

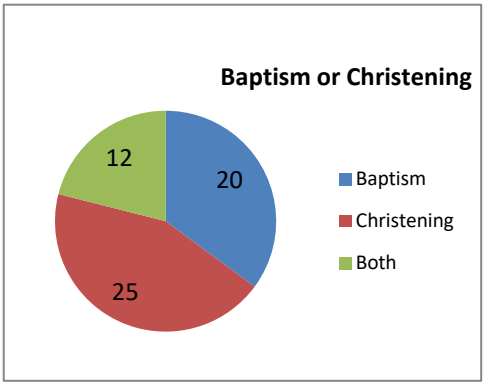


Fig. 3.13 Preference for using 'Baptism' or 'Christening'

Although some respondents said that the word used did not matter because 'they are the same and mean the same'[202], other respondents were aware of nuanced differences in meaning and use.

Those who used both words were aware that these are words which indicate membership: those belonging to the church use 'Baptism', while those on the outside of the church use 'Christening'.

> 'Christening everyone understands. Baptism tends to be more church folk.'[203]

[200] Aid12.
[201] Aid1.
[202] Hild8.
[203] Aid1.

> ‘Before I became Christian: christening. After I became a Christian: baptism. The first has no real meaning, it was simply getting the child done, the second is biblical.’[204]

3.3 Conclusion

It was during the first stage of the research that I encountered most surprises. Kavanagh and Ayres describe research interviews as ‘inherently uncertain’.[205] They argue that the researcher can not predict everything that will emerge, and although they were referring to research with women who had experienced perinatal loss, this was also true for my research in which women disclosed their experiences of shame and loss. Of course the questionnaires were fixed so there was no chance to respond to the stories disclosed by the respondents although during the interview stage the conversation was more adaptive. I had anticipated that the mothers (and especially those who were church attenders) would talk about the spirituality of birth and perhaps a deepening relationship with God, maybe even through the symbol of the Virgin Mary. None of these were mentioned directly, with spirituality being expressed through concepts of belonging and human relationships. I had not anticipated the discussion around godparents, although the conversation led me to consider my own choices of godparents for my children which included at least one atheist who we thought would care for our children if we died prematurely. In this case I was comparing my own choices with those of the respondents. I had also underestimated the importance of the christening gown even though I had been carefully keeping our family gown which has been passed on through generations. I shall explore the symbolic importance of the gown in a later chapter. Again, as I listened to the stories of the mothers, I was comparing them with my own story.

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[204] Bede3.
[205] Karen Kavanagh and Lioness Ayres, ‘“Not as Bad as it Could Have Been”: Assessing and Mitigating Harm during Research Interviews on Sensitive Topics’, *Research in Nursing and Health*, 21:1 (1998), 91-97, p95.

Although I had planned for the questionnaire to be a form of written interview so allowing a lot of white space for detailed responses at times I was surprised by the depth of response offered by many women had gone into great detail about events (some of which had brought shame) which had happened in the past. One woman had attached a letter explaining her relationship with the church, and the sadness she continued to feel about the rejection she had experienced as a child from the church at which I was then vicar. Other questionnaires were barely complete but still contained some glimpses into experiences which I considered to be worth including.

Throughout the questionnaire response the insider/outsider conflict can be seen. This is most obvious in the responses of those women who were not regular attenders when their child was baptised but who had come into the church subsequently, these women were inclined to reassess their actions and motivations with some regret expressing an awareness of a different significance for baptism from their new perspective. For some, this was most apparent in the change of the word they chose to use: from christening to baptism.

I had begun to analyse the data for the questionnaires before I began the interviewing stage of the research so I was able to explore some of the themes with the mothers I interviewed, particularly about the choice of godparents, the family robe, the tea afterwards and the opportunity to celebrate with family present. Despite the intervening years (most of the questionnaire respondents were elderly) these material elements of the christening continue to be important. This is revealed in the conversations which I had with mothers who had just, or were about to have their child christened. In the following chapter I describe these

conversations, using the mothers' words as much as possible in order to tell their christening stories.

Chapter Four: The Conversations with Mothers

During the third phase of the research, I met and talked with thirteen mothers who did not usually attend church. These were women who had been asked by their vicar if they would be willing to talk to me and whom I then contacted. Only three of the women interviewed had been passed on to me by the six priests who had originally agreed to participate in the research. I met the rest of the women in other ways. In this chapter, I shall summarise these conversations, the analyses of which can be seen in later chapters. However, my interpretation begins as soon as I decide which words to use and which to exclude. In fact, it could be argued that my interpretation begins when I start the conversation with a pre-prepared list of themes (even though it was not in written form). So, although my intention is to allow the women to speak for themselves, in this chapter I offer only an interpretation of a conversation which has been constructed by both the women and myself.

In describing this research, in order to respect the narrative unfolding in these conversations, I have attempted to summarise each conversation individually. The mothers, as I talked to them, told me about their relationships, the birth of their child(ren) and their hopes for their family: each with their own story. As I quote from the conversations, some of the phrases may seem incomplete, as there were frequent interruptions or distractions from their children, doorbells and telephones. While these distractions were not helpful, they are a usual element of mothers' lives. I had chosen to talk to the women in their own homes so they could be relaxed, although in most cases some-one else was present in the house if not in the room. The conversations lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes. Although I did not go to meet the women with a written list of questions, I did have an idea that I wanted to explore the themes which had been highlighted in the inital phase of the study. Nevertheless, the conversations were wide-ranging, and covered a number of concerns. I think it was easier for

the women to talk about stuff of material importance such as clothes, gifts and cake than motivations or emotions. This reflects the embodied nature of their lives, and perhaps also the fact that I was a stranger to them.

I also observed four of the baptisms and have noted which ones I was able to observe. From the data already described, the baptisms I observed followed the same pattern each time. There were fifty to eighty guests at each, the family were wearing their best clothes with the men in suits and women in dresses, and most of the congregation were wearing similar clothes. The guests were always reluctant to enter the church before the service and remained ill at ease. The congregations were not engaged until they came to the font where they became more engaged. The clergy were enthusiastic, working hard to appear welcoming and engaging. There were many posed photographs taken afterwards around the font and in the church with some families using a professional photographer.

For ease of reference each response was given a code with the first letters of the person speaking's pseudonym and a number which can be found in the footnotes. This number reflects the flow of the conversation: at times exchanges were brief but at others fluent and detailed. Each exchange, which in the transcript may be just a sentence or a whole paragraph was given a number. Before each summary I include details about the mother and her family, whether the interview took place before or after the baptism and whether I observed the baptism.

4.1. Claire, Dental Nurse, 25

St Elfleda's Church

Not married to Will, 27, Dentist

Child: Oliver

Pre-baptism (not observed)

Claire talked about family tradition in relation to the birth of Oliver and his christening. Ideally she would have liked him to be christened at twelve weeks but there was a waiting list at the church so it was not possible. When I asked about what the baby would be wearing for the christening, again she answered in terms of tradition:

> 'Will's mam wanted him to get christened in Will's christening robe and I didn't want him to look like a jester. I like tradition but I couldn't do that to him. He sleeps in Will's crib. We've bought a new mattress and everything and that's a family tradition that his Mam upkeeps but we couldn't do the robe.'[206]

Claire also talked about the church connection – her grandparents had taken her to Sunday School in that church as she was growing up, although her parents did not attend. There was an expectation that the baby would be christened in the same church. They had begun to think about the christening before he was born, and after he was born they took him into church: 'so he could have a look round.'[207] Claire had considered the meaning of the christening carefully and her role in it, 'setting him on the right path':

> 'I think it's introducing him to God effectively for me, and because he is small he's not big enough to make the choice himself and when he's older

[206] Cl23.
[207] Cl53.

> he'll have had the introduction and I want him to learn and to be a nice person and live by the rules of God.'[208]

When I asked about godparents, Claire replied, 'Well, we chose them to be guardian angels for our little boy if he needs help.'[209] Claire had chosen her best friend whom she had known all her life, 'I thought it would be nice to have her involved in his life the same way as she has been in mine.'[210] They had also chosen her husband's best friend and her younger brother who was chronically ill but whose resilience she admired. As she talked about her brother's fortitude she also talked about her grandfather's experience of God:

> 'My grandparents weren't religious until my granddad was poorly and started to read the bible. He swears that he had a religious experience, so he thought that helped him survive so they are catholics now and I've always wondered if my brother because he's in a similar situation, secretly prays or asks help from God so that was another reason why I wanted N to be his godfather.'[211]

In reply to a question about the party, Claire said, 'I wouldn't say it was a party, more of a gathering I would say and for all of the kids to play together.' However, she had invited eighty guests and joked with her sister that she would be having to make eighty cupcakes. Claire was determined the party would be a family event rather than an opportunity for drinking.

[208] Cl61.
[209] Cl81.
[210] Cl68.
[211] Cl77.

4.2 **Daniela,** (30, GP)

St Francis,
Married to Jon (32, accountant)
Ben (3 years), Ruth (4 months)
Post-baptism (not observed)

Daniela had grown up in the church, attending with her parents before their marriage ended, and with her grandparents and especially her grandfather who had been a Reader, but who had died the previous year. Daniela's connection with him remained through her church attendance.

Daniela's grandfather had organised the first christening, finding a retired priest he knew to preside because the parish was in interregnum. However, Daniela was embarrassed by this man's behaviour towards her in-laws as, during his sermon, he had quizzed them on the Bible reading for the day and asked them direct questions about baptism. She considered this to be inhospitable and designed to make the family uncomfortable.

She was positive about the new vicar at the church and had started to attend his monthly toddler group, which she understood as being a way of recreating the sense of community she had experienced there as a child. There was clearly some sense of home-coming represented in her (now infrequent) church attendance; associations particularly with her grandfather, but actually with all her family, were important.

> 'Like if I go to church I see my sister, dad, my nan, my nephew all in one big go.'[212]

[212] Da32.

She describes the christenings as being, ‘like a hinge’ which will encourage her to read bible stories to the children, because her Nan is going to buy her some toddler bible story books, and giving her, ‘more responsibility to take them to church, to make it more part of their lives.’[213]

The family theme in Daniela’s responses continue as she explains that she had lost touch with her own godparents who had been friends of her parents, and so did not want to choose friends, who might also be unreliable as godparents. So they had chosen their siblings and spouses to be godparents as reliable people:

> ‘Even if they hadn’t been christened, we’d already had that conversation. So they’d look after them if anything happened to us.’[214]

Although family attended both christenings, Ruth’s was more pared down, but for both there were about thirty guests. Although Ben’s had been part of the main Sunday service, Ruth’s was in the afternoon to accommodate her sick father-in –law. She had preferred that christening, as they had got to know the vicar, despite Ruth’s screaming throughout. However, this was at odds with her long relationship with the church people who had joined them all for the cup of tea after Ben’s christening.

> ‘I think as a few people in the church were disappointed, ’cos we’d been a couple of times and they’d got to know her and stuff and we said that everyone from church was welcome and a few did come. So the following week we had our welcome to church. And I put her dress on her again and

[213] Da49.
[214] Da84.

took her down. I don't know if he does that for everybody or whether it was just that people know her. It's a good idea.'[215]

When asked if she thought it was her responsibility to pass on her faith, Daniela replied, 'in me and Jon's relationship, yes.'[216] When I broadened out the question to be about women in particular she replied:

'We're the organisers; we make things happen I believe, whether it's church or anything that's what we do.'[217]

4.3 Emily, (42, police woman)
Holy Saviour,
Married to Simon (37, commercial diver)
Cheryl, (1 year)
pre-baptism (observed)

It was important to Emily to do things properly. She had wanted a 'proper church wedding' in her local village church and also a traditional christening. She talked about the importance of community – the newly opened tea shop, new houses being built in the area, and her plans for her daughter to go to the local primary school, 'hopefully she'll meet people at school that she's been at church with or the toddler group even.'[218]

[215] Da101.
[216] Da110.
[217] Da112.
[218] Em10.

She was keen to have Cheryl christened in order to 'welcome her into the religious life' so that she did not have to wait until she went to school before having any religious input. Emily's own religious beliefs had been formed through celebrating the festivals at school.[219]

Emily had waited a 'hell of a long time'[220] for her baby and as an older mother was delighted to have her. She was enjoying spending time taking her daughter to various activities and having a better social life than when she was at work. She describes Cheryl as 'precious gift' and wanted to make sure that God knew she was grateful to have her. She expressed a trepidation that this might all be too good to be true, suggesting that they might be in need of God's protection. She describes growing closer to Simon and feeling more worthy of his family as she has married him and had his child, 'I felt sort of later on it has made me whole, it has made me who I was meant to be.'[221]

She was excited about the baby's christening robe which her mother had crocheted. She had needed good notice in order to get it finished in time, but Emily had chosen to have the baby christened a little bit older 'so she could smile and be a bit more alert, rather than just a tiny little baby'.[222] When I asked if there was a family dress she could have worn, Emily told me about her very small family – her mother was adopted. She wanted this dress to be, 'an heirloom I want it to be kept for ever.'[223]

When I asked if she thought it was her job as a mother to organise the christening she agreed, but said that was because she made most of the decisions about the baby. However, she was

[219] Em7.
[220] Em19.
[221] Em40.
[222] Em52.
[223] Em58.

sure that Simon was more religious than she was and more likely to pass on religion to his daughter not least through buying a family bible for her christening.

They had chosen to have three godparents because the paperwork given by the vicar suggested that three was traditional. She had chosen her best friend who had been her bridesmaid but who also goes to church regularly and Simon's brother and his wife.

The christening was planned for early afternoon with a 'gathering' for about eighty people in a local pub afterwards. They had ordered a cake, had giant silver balloons and party bags for the children attending. There had been a tradition of keeping the top layer of the wedding cake for the christening (I had done this myself) and I asked Emily about this:

> 'I did keep a layer of fruit cake and at the time I thought we could keep this for years. But we opened it at Christmas. I was married in September. And then I was pregnant in January.'[224]

[224] Em86.

4.4 **Gemma** (28, job centre manager)

St Ann's,
Married to Phil (34, computer technician and systems manager)
Sally, 9 months
Post baptism (not observed)
There was a follow up conversation and lots of photos[225]

I was given Gemma's contact details by another mother I had met, and although she lives slightly out of the area, she was happy to talk to me and in fact I went for a second visit to pick up some promised photographs. Her daughter Sally was almost one when we first met. There had been some fertility problems and the pregnancy was not completely straightforward so the couple were grateful to have their baby. In fact Gemma said, 'I can't imagine loving anyone as much as I love Sally.'[226]

As well as thanking God, Gemma knew that all her family had been christened and she wanted to do the 'right thing'. When she approached her parish church to arrange the christening the response seemed negative; she felt isolated when she attended on a Sunday morning. However, in the next church, the vicar was welcoming so she and her friend started going to a toddler group each week. I wondered why she had not given up after the first negative experience:

> 'Cos I believe me personally believe a child should be christened. My own personal belief I think they should be christened. Cos if there is a God, it is the right choice to make.'[227]

[225] See appendix 4.
[226] Ge64.
[227] Ge37.

Sally had two outfits for the christening which Gemma's mother had bought from a dressmaker when on holiday. There had been a family dress which was too small by the time of the christening and a family shawl which was too warm for a hot July day.

> 'I wanted a traditional christening gown, a long one – it had to be white. I didn't want any other colour. I know I keep going back to my wedding but I just think of it as a similar thing, but white is pure and you should be married in white and christened in white…. then for the party she had a big like gypsy like party dress.'[228]

Gemma's grandmother had said she could not bring the baby into her house before she was christened, and both her mother and fahter told her that the baby should be christened young. However, the christening was delayed because Gemma wanted to save up for the party and to have her choice of venue. She had a big party with eighty guests, in a local function room, for which she and her family prepared the food. Phil's mother had the cake (a pink princess cake) made; there were balloons and lots of presents.

Gemma remembered most of the day. They had got to the church early and greeted their friends at the door of the church so they sat down last. She remembered going to the front, although she managed not to look at anyone because she felt so self-conscious and the sign of the cross was made with oil blessed by the bishop. She liked the candle which they were given:

> 'She said a really good point too she said that what they encourage families to do after they've been christened to remind them they're spreading the

[228] Ge71-2.

> light, to light it once a year and blow it out with the birthday cake. I've kept that candle down there. It's in a nice box.'[229]

Gemma had no qualms about sharing the christening with another family, especially because they also attended the pram service so they had got to know one another. But in preparation for the christening, the vicar had invited four families whose babies were being christened within the next month. There was another family there, whom Gemma found embarrassing - they were using their phones and chatting while the vicar was trying to explain the service. Gemma was pleased she did not have to share her daughter's christening with them, 'I don't think it meant anything to them'. [230]

4.5 **Jane**, 27, cleaner
St Paul's Church
Married to Glen (mechanic)
Children: Lauren, 8 (already christened), Ashley, 3 months
Pre-Baptism (not observed)

Jane lived with her husband, Glen, to whom she had been married for three years - Lauren had been their bridesmaid. They had chosen a different church for their wedding because it was 'picture perfect'. Jane and Lauren had been regular attenders for six weeks before the wedding in order to be allowed to marry there: 'I had to show willing. Lauren wasn't very amused.'[231]

[229] Ge118.
[230] Ge15 (follow-up).
[231] Ja49.

However, they chose St Paul's (although they did not live in that parish) because Glen and his family had all been christened there. She did tell me that there had been a 'heated debate' between them as they tried to decide which family church they should use. She thought his family would not have been able to find her church so easily (although it was only two miles away).

Jane's mother had died after Lauren was born; this had been significant for her. The loss of her mother and grandmother the previous year had made the family 'tradition' of baptism all the more important to Jane. It offered the opportunity for the family to be gathered in celebration rather than mourning. When I asked why she had chosen baptism, she replied:

> 'To be truthful to get the family together and celebrate her being here. And obviously we've both lost our mams, the most time we see each other, family and things, is funerals.'[232]

She and Glen had chosen four godparents – two men and two women: Jane's younger brother, Glen's 'best friend', Jane's best friend (who was also godmother to Lauren). She had made this choice based on trust. When I asked about whether being godparents might involve praying or religious practice, Jane replied:

> 'I do have religious friends, I'm sorry but they might not look after my children as well as these people would.'[233]

[232] Ja52.
[233] Ja89-90.

The conversation moved on to what the baby would be wearing for the christening: a new dress, a satin bib with 'My Christening Day' embroidered on, Dior shoes. 'She is going to look the bee's knees.'[234] Jane had kept Lauren's christening clothes in her memory box, although there was a shawl which had been used by both her brother and Lauren which she was intending to use. However, she had chosen not to use the one that she had worn as a baby and which her father had kept because she wanted the girls each to have her own dress.

Jane told me about the party she had planned in the sports centre near the church. She had ordered a cake, and she and her friends were planning to make: 'Crispy cakes and sandwiches'.[235]

Jane also told me about the presents she was anticipating Ashley receiving:

> 'I know she's getting a silver cross, a silver money box and the first tooth and first curl set and a photo frame cos I've told that. But I think a lot of people are just going to give us money and cos I've opened a bank account. That's what we did my other daughter. So we'll try and save up for them when they're older. Just to give them a little hand.'[236]

[234] Ja78.
[235] Ja71.
[236] Ja27/28.

4.6 **Julia** (24, airport ground staff)
St Mary's,
Oscar (6 months)
Post-baptism (not observed)

Julia is a single mother who lives with her mother: the father of the baby left during her pregnancy. Although she does maintain some kind of contact with him, she was taking full responsibility for her child, 'I think it's my baby'.

There were family connections with church: her grandmother and aunt attended 'all the time' and, although brought up in the RAF, Julia remembered going to church with her grandmother as a child. When her father died, her mother lost her faith and stopped attending regularly, although the family continues to attend Midnight Mass at Christmas. This meant that they did not choose the local parish church for the christening but, rather, asked their 'family vicar' who had christened her sister and taken her father's funeral.

Even though her mam had offered her a family robe , Julia had bought a little suit made for Oscar to wear at the christening, when it arrived it had not fitted properly so she had altered it –'I felt dead clever by the end of it'.[237]

The christening took place during the parish's main Sunday worship. There was another christening party present with fewer guests. Julia had invited about eighty guests.

[237] Ju51.

> ‘I just thought it was something nice and special ’cos his dad isn’t around so to me it was like you don’t have that side of the family around you but you still have all of these people around to protect you who care for you and are around.’[238]

The godparents were very important. Most of them were friends. She had also asked her cousin who attended church regularly although this had not been the prime reason for asking her to be godmother:

> ‘I want people to show him a good example and to know that they are going to be there for him and those were the people I thought would do that.’[239]

Julia had wanted to have the christening on her father’s birthday, but it had not been possible for the church so it was held the following weekend. She also told me that Oscar had been born on the birthday of her ‘Grandad Jack’ (whom she had never met),

> ‘It felt a bit nice you know that connecting.’[240]

The party afterwards was held at home. Julia had made the christening cake, she was very proud of it – it was striped and had teddy bears going round it so it looked ‘like a merry go round for teddy bears’.[241]

[238] Ju16.
[239] Ju89.
[240] Ju118.
[241] Ju109.

4.7 Laura (24, cleaner)
St Paul's church,
Not married to Mick (31, forklift driver), present at the interview
Lily Jane (4 months)
Pre-baptism (observed)

I had arranged to meet Laura the day after the christening but she had rearranged the meeting for just before the christening so that her partner, Mick, could be there. During the conversation it became clear that the christening was happening at his instigation.

It was only at the end of the interview that they disclosed the painful experience of miscarriage they had quite soon before Lily Jane (aged 21 weeks at the time of the interview) had been born. The love they expressed for Lily was a fiercely protective love born out of a 'really hard' experience. However the birth of Lily meant that they were a family now. When I asked if perhaps the baptism might serve as a way of publicly acknowledging that relationship, Mick replied:

> 'I've never thought of that. As far as I'm concerned, I have never thought about getting married. Everybody knows that Laura's me partner and this is my child. That is my family. Yes.'[242]

Family was important to both parents although Mick had family living in the same street and round the corner – he said he saw his family every day. In fact they said they were exhausted by the number of visitors they had received when they first came out of hospital. When I asked why they had chosen to have Lily christened it was because most of Mick's family had

[242] Mick142.

been christened in St Paul's church, this was their church (although he had no memory of any member of his family actually regularly attending worship there):

> 'I've been christened, the family has been christened and if she is christened when she is older she can choose which path she wants to take...'[243]

Throughout our meeting, I was conscious of Mick's desire to do the right thing. He was anxious about the party, did not know where his family had to sit in the church and was upset that his auntie had given her apologies. This aunt was the most religious member of family (they thought she might be a vicar) and, more importantly, she had not yet met Lily Jane.

The couple had attended church the previous Sunday to be welcomed by the congregation and receive their candle. Although invited, the godparents had not attended the service. They described receiving a blessing during the communion although they did not know how the service 'worked'.

> 'After we got the candle and we got to the peace and they were brilliant. The people come round to see us.'[244]

A lot of our conversation was about the party, an important event in the life of the whole family. They had invited one hundred and forty guests – the full capacity of the sports centre and that was 'just family.' Many could not come which seemed to have been something of a relief although particularly disappointing that the people who had not seen Lily yet were not able to come. So they were now able to invite some others including their next door

[243] Mick58.
[244] Mick311.

neighbour. Although one of their relations was doing the food, they were concerned about the expense of the day, 'But she's worth it'.

The christening cake was to be an important part of the party. It had been made by a neighbour and they expressed their appreciation of her generosity. Although nobody had seen it, they brought it down to show me. It was a traditional iced fruit cake with a stork, stained glass window and bible on. 'The only downside is we don't like fruitcake.'[245]

4.8 **Linda** (administrative assistant)

All Saints
Married (not referred to by name), 39, a self employed medic
Ollie (13 months)
Post-baptism (not observed)

Linda did not attend church and had felt hypocritical in using the church for this service. However she was put under pressure by her own family and her husband who thought they should do it because it was 'tradition'. Eventually, she contacted the vicar who met her to discuss the significance of the baptism: he was key to her decision.

> 'So I have to say, he did make me feel so much better about it then after we had him christened I was so pleased cos it was the most lovely service ever, the words that the vicar spoke had such meaning. And even now I get a bit emotional about it some of the things he said you could feel that they had meaning so, at the end of the day I was actually pleased that I'd had him christened.'[246]

[245] La183.
[246] Lin3.

Linda had been married abroad without family or friends present, 'It didn't go down well with my mother.'[247] This rejection of 'tradition' for its own sake is also reflected in her attitude to the christening: 'there's nothing against tradition, but I don't think you should do something just because it is traditional.'[248]

I wondered if the christening might then have represented the family celebration of their relationship, but with the emphasis turned towards the baby rather than Linda.

> 'So yes I guess that's it…it was nice to have all the family together and for it all to be focussed on Ollie …..I nearly didn't have Ollie so he is like the baby I thought I never would have so to actually have him and for him to be the centre of attention. That was really nice.'[249]

Linda went to on to say that she had undergone IVF in order to conceive him which meant that he was very special to her. She felt both emotional and grateful during the service and realised that it had been the right thing to do. She had chosen to have the baptism during the main Sunday service because she knew there would not be many guests, but she had wanted the church to feel full and there be a choir.

Ollie had worn a smart pair of trousers, a tie and a waistcoat for the christening. Linda said she might have considered using a robe if he had been younger, 'But at his age, he's too grown up. He's a boy.'[250]

[247] Lin13.
[248] Lin1.
[249] Lin16.
[250] Lin44.

The guests were close family and the godparents. The godparents had been chosen from among family and their friends – a friend of her husband and a friend of herself, and her eighteen-year-old niece:

> 'I chose them not to be family because he's so special to family already and God forbid if anything did happen they would be there anyway so I thought it would be nice to have some very close friends to have as godparents so then he would be special.'[251]

After the service they went out for lunch then back to their house. Linda had again experienced a sense of pressure as her mother and sister kept asking her about the cake until she went out to buy one then decorate it herself. So after the lunch, they came back to her house for a cup of tea and cake. She gave the neighbours and other well-wishers a piece of cake as a way of thanking them.

4.9 **Lisa**, (25, dress shop owner)
All Saints
Not married to Craig (32, Retail Manager)
May (4 months)
Post-christening (not observed)

Aesthetics were important in all Lisa's choices, from the lightness of the church itself to its setting, and the exact colour of the dress. I found Lisa's answers to be very 'proper': the language she used was formal, she obviously wanted to give the 'right' answers. This was expressed as she talked about the christening – she arrived early for the christening and greeted her guests, was concerned about the perfect christening attire, and wanted to choose

[251] Lin49.

the ‘perfect’ church. Both she and her partner had been christened and they wanted to continue that tradition themselves.

> ‘It’s just family tradition. We’ve both been christened ourselves and we thought it was nice to keep the tradition going and as well for her to be the same as us as well.’[252]

There had been thirty guests at the christening. Afterwards, there was a ‘light buffet’ at a local pub run by family friends which finished in the late afternoon. They had decided not to have a traditional fruit cake, but instead her sister made individual cup cakes which were displayed beautifully.

> ‘But we decided to go for something different. ’Cos as I say it was like a light lunch afterwards. Just to have a cup of tea and a cake.’[253]

Lisa had expressed her disappointment not to have been married before they had a child and said that she had considered having a joint wedding and christening. However, she was sure that the baby ought to be christened at four months and that would not have given her enough time to plan for a wedding. She contrasted the stress that is associated with weddings with the relaxed nature of May’s christening. Nevertheless, even within the christening, they were acknowledged as a unit by the family gathering:

> ‘It was lovely having all the family come together. It made us feel more like family now. We came together in the church.’ [254]

[252] Li93.
[253] Li114.
[254] Li116.

The service had been in the afternoon so had been relatively private. Lisa was concerned that it be something intimate which would be spoiled by the presence of strangers. She described the 'ceremony' as 'lovely'. May had been particularly intrigued by the candle:

> 'She focussed a lot on when the candle was being lit and that was the bit that she liked when she stopped crying and she was up at the font and that was the bit when she had the water placed on her head.'[255]

The christening robe was very important. There had been a family robe which was knitted and which they had intended to use, but the weather had been too hot for this to be practical. However, they did use the shawl which was bought for Lisa's aunt by her godmother and had been used for christenings in the family since then.

Lisa was collecting a box of 'firsts' in which she was hoping to keep some of the memories of her daughter's beginnings. The candle she was given at the christening which 'they said you might light this on her birthday' has been put away into the 'firsts' box with her dress and pictures:

> 'I'm trying to create memories.....We won't get it out every day, we'll open it when she's older and it'll be lovely.'[256]

[255] Li20.
[256] Li154.

4.10 **Liz** (26, social worker)

St Aidan's Church

Married to Jim

Megan age 3, Ben 6 months

Pre-baptism, (observed)

Liz told me that she and her husband had started talking about christening as soon as their first child was born. When I asked why she wanted to have her children christened, she replied:

> 'My family has always been, you want your children recognised by the church. So I want my children to follow the family. Jim's family attends church regularly but not mine.'[257]

So, being christened was important to both parents, and to their families. Also important was St Aidan's church with which they felt connected. Liz told me that her mother had sometimes taken her to church, so she sometimes saw people whom she knew and had grown up with. Her family continued to attend church at Christmas with her grandmother and sister. Both she and her brother had been married there. So, it was, 'Really special for me when Megan was christened there and all the family were there. Literally all under one roof.'[258]

When I asked her if the christening was about blessing, she replied that it was not for Jim and herself, but it was for his great-grandmother and her friendship group. Despite this she said that she had felt under no pressure to have the children christened. She told me it was about:

[257] Liz28.
[258] Liz36.

> ‘Us wanting them recognised and acknowledged by the church.’[259]

As we began to talk about beliefs, Liz told me about her grandfather who had died five months previously, but she said that she still felt his presence with her:

> ‘When the vicar is holding the baby I feel like I will feel my grandad’s presence there more, partly because he would have wanted to be there. It is like a connection.’[260]

She and Jim had chosen friends to be godparents - Liz choosing the godmother and Jim the godfather. As she talked about her choice of godmother, Liz told me:

> ‘I have got a bond with my best friend. And she became Megan’s godmother, it was significant and strengthened the bond. She will continue that in her relationship with Ben.’[261]

Liz had spent some time thinking about the party and choosing a suitable venue. She told me that her friend would be making a cake but she had considered the venue carefully, eventually choosing to hire a local community centre:

> ‘It’s not just about the booze-up. We did not want it in the pub. Instead it will end up like the kid’s birthday party.’[262]

[259] Liz52.
[260] Liz70.
[261] Liz85.
[262] Liz103.

4.11 Sandra (25 tele-sales)

All Saints,

Married to Lee (32, self employed joiner)

Annabelle (2yrs 4 months), Tom (3 months)

Pre-baptism (observed)

Sandra lived outside the parish but her husband's family lived and worked in the parish, and his grandmother attends the church regularly. Sandra felt strongly that it was not her church, and she would have preferred to go back to the town and church where she had been christened so her family could be around her.[263] However, it was the church in which she had been married. When Sandra had discovered her pregnancy she had arranged her wedding in just six weeks:

> 'That was why we brought the wedding forward. I said I don't want my children to be born out of wedlock, I wanted to be married. I think it feels like a proper family if you're married.' [264]

Sandra's children were to be christened together. Sandra had been offered the family robe, but she rejected the offer. Instead, they had been bought new outfits for the occasion with a 'pretty princess dress'[265] for Annabelle and a suit for Tom, because Lee, 'doesn't want them in, you know the christening gowns.'[266]

Although the christening was well attended, they had not booked a room for the party. Instead they planned to go to the village pub for a drink then bring mainly her family back to

[263] San123.
[264] San127.
[265] San32.
[266] San32.

her house to eat. Neighbours were providing the food and drink for it – 'I've got everything pretty much for free.'[267]

Sandra had herself been baptised at the age of eighteen and at the same time as her younger sister but had felt embarrassed and thought the water spoiled her hair, so she did not want that for her own children. The Christianity she had expressed through her choice to be baptised had been tempered by the tragedy of her miscarriages and the death of the young man who lived next door.

Her husband and mother had told her that the children would only have access to the other rites of passage in church if they were christened:

> 'My mum said so you can't get married and you can't get buried.'[268]

Both she and Lee had chosen friends to be godparents, three godmothers and three godfathers. Most of these were friends whom they thought were reliable and the couple who lived next door whose son had recently died. They had thought this might be a way of helping them in their grief. Speaking about the choice of godparents, Sandra said:

> 'I said to my mum I want someone to look after the kids and I thought that was the whole point of a godparent was that if you die the kids are left with someone who would look after them and my mum said, don't be silly, it's not like that any more. They'd come to us.'[269]

[267] San53.
[268] San109.
[269] San77.

4.12 **Sarah**, (20, supermarket check out operator)

St Elfleda,

Not married to (un-named) (22, works at local tourist attraction)

Melanie (9 months)

Pre baptism (not observed)

Sarah was disappointed at the delay in having Melanie christened – she had to wait until her daughter was nine months old:

> 'I was planning for it to be earlier probably when she was about four months. But by the time we got round to it, when we went up there, so at the time, it was the earliest time available really.'[270]

Having had contact with church groups as she was growing up, Sarah was also sure about her own identity as a member of the Church of England and realised that it would open up doors for her daughter:

> 'I myself went to the Catholic schools and at the time it was the best school and so I think it sort of opens up more opportunities.'[271]

Sarah was not making extravagant plans for the christening. Her daughter would be too big for the dress which she and her sister had worn:

> 'It was something that my nanny made for my sister .It was sort of sentimental. I never got to meet my nanny, so it was nice to know that it was made.'[272]

[270] Sar26.
[271] Sar3.
[272] Sar40.

However, she had not yet thought of an alternative. She was sure she did not want a big party – her mother would help her make the food but had refused to host the party even though there were only about thirty guests.

> 'Me and my sister were saying are we going to gypsy christening it? Like big fat gypsy wedding. But no.....you don't need to make a song and dance about it. I don't see why you need to dress it up or anything.'[273]

While her partner was happy to 'go along with' the idea of the christening, Sarah was sure that it had been her idea and she that she would make it happen:

> 'And he's not bothered if he does get christened or not. It's part of what I wanted to do. It's my family. It's part of our tradition. So we're passing that down.'[274]

I asked if she thought that the christening might be considered as the new wedding but she instead talked about her plans to get married, 'but I think people in this day and age rush into it and it doesn't seem to be like for ever which it's meant to be. I think it's sort of just people just do it.[275] She was especially sure that she had not wanted to get married when she was pregnant, in case people thought that was the only reason for the marriage.[276]

[273] Sar93.
[274] Sar76.
[275] Sar83.
[276] Sar86.

4.13 **Tracey** (27, shop assistant)

St Paul's Church, G
Not married to Pete (forklift driver in 'heavy plant')
Kelsey, 8, Chris, 4, Dean, 9 months

Pre-baptism (observed)

Tracey told me something of her family story, talking particularly about her grandmother who had lived in the countryside and had attended church every week – her aunt continued to do so. Tracey remembered going to church with her grandmother and was keen to reconnect with her. Those attending the christening would be mainly family, Tracey had also chosen godparents from her family. When her daughter was christened, her sister's boyfriend was a godfather, but now they had separated, he no longer had any contact with the family.

> 'So that's why I try to stick to family members. Otherwise now they're going to stay around so they aren't just going to disappear.'[277]

Tracey's previous two children had been baptised with her sister's children so they were not alone, but Dean was to be christened with another little girl. I asked how she was feeling about that:

> 'It's just knowing there's another family there and kind of watching, that you don't know, seeing that you're someone that's getting done.....I might feel a bit shy and stupid.....' [278]

When I asked if she thought having the children christened would make any difference in their lives, Tracey told me about her daughter whom she considered to be very spiritual

[277] Tr37.
[278] Tr47.

because 'she talks to family that's passed.'[279] One of those she talks to is Tracey's grandmother – she was able to describe her well, and Tracey hears her chatting to her in her bedroom. I asked if she thought that the christening might have enabled her daughter to connect more with her grandmother:

> 'In a way I do 'cos she went to church as well. And in a way I do, I don't know if it's true or not. I do think there'll be some connecting along the line.'[280]

Talking about her own faith, Tracey said that she did believe in God although she did not sit and pray, but was keen to tell me about her family's strong church connections. She had been thankful to God for her babies, and agreed that perhaps bringing them for christening was a way of expressing thanks. She had struggled to get pregnant and 'felt as if there was somebody there that helped sort of thing'[281] – this seemed to be the source of her gratitude.

4.14 Conclusion

The women with whom I talked were willing to participate in conversation with me which was open. Most of the conversations lasted for longer than an hour, during which time we had talked about their lives, their children and their hopes for themselves and their children. As the conversations developed and I became more trusted, so the women shared details of their lives which were more private. Over half of the women told me about their struggles to

[279] Tr82.
[280] Tr133.
[281] Tr150.

conceive or to carry their child to birth. These struggles, on the boundary of life and death, had led them to a greater awareness of 'connection' with others, and even with God.[282]

Although I did also attend some of the christenings, my relationship with these women was short-lived: not developing beyond this recorded conversation, so perhaps not having built up the levels of trust which would lead to a more honest exchange. Nevertheless the data collected provides a resource which enriches the data from earlier phases of the research. In chapter six and following I analyse and offer an interpretation of these findings. Some offered me photos of the cake, presents or the dress for my future use, they are in appendix 4.

As described earlier, many of those I talked to were not actually from the parishes initially identified for the research but had been introduced to me in different ways. While I did have informal conversations with the clergy to whom they had connected, I kept to my initial research proposal, so went on to interview the clergy of the six parishes where questionnaires had been completed. Although this means that most of these clergy are not personally connected with the mothers whose stories have been recounted here, the clergy perspective which follows enhances and develops them. As the parish clergy describe their understandings of infant baptism, offering their interpretation of the rite, and their experience of sharing this with families, so the ethnography is 'thickened'. While the clergy have some sympathy with the perspectives of the mothers whom they encounter, and some understanding of their motivations, the theological expectations of baptism which they carry add another dimension to the meaning-making involved in the rite.

[282] This reflects the findings of Jenny Hall, 'Spirituality at the Beginning of Life', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, vol 15 (2006), 804 – 810.

Chapter Five: Conversations with Clergy

In the previous two chapters I have paid attention to the narratives of mothers. In this chapter I shall be attending to the words of the six clergy who participated in this research. After summarising each conversation, I draw out some common themes, exploring commonalities and differences in these clergy's experiences of Baptism. In this chapter I shall not be analysing their interpretations of the meaning-making of the women, rather, I shall be drawing on these in the thematic interpretative chapters which follow.

These clergy had been important in allowing me access to the mothers who were participating, but they were more than gatekeepers, their willingness to enter into conversation meant that they, too, were important participants in the research. Although additional clergy contributed by putting me in contact with some mothers, the interviews I describe here were with the six who had engaged with me from the beginning of the research project. One of the important elements of the conversation I had with them was why they had referred so few women: the answer to this question adds an extra dynamic to the research. The conversations were wide-ranging: being genuine conversations rather than interviews. Of course this has meant that different conversations focused on different topics, as clergy talked about aspects which were of importance to them.

The participating clergy have been trained by the Church of England with varied parish experience and they all had been educated in Theology. To some extent they are mediating the formal theology of the academy, and indeed, of the church with their lived experience. Most found this difficult: my questioning exposed their vulnerability in managing their own

expectations of baptism, those of the 'Church' and those (often only perceived) of the participants.

5.1 Garry, St Aidan's

Garry had been keen to contribute to the research, primarily as he was seeking to engage better with the families who came to his church for baptism through the liturgy but also through meaningful follow-up. He had recently revised the parish baptism policy. Previously baptisms were held only monthly during the main Sunday service – consequently baptisms were booked two years ahead: 'The theology was about being included and welcomed into the family of the church. But for me it was a disastrous decision.'[283] Now baptism was offered in the main service or later on which meant that the service could be personalised and the number of guests unrestricted. He saw the disadvantage of this as being that the baptism families formed less of a link to the family of the church, although each family is allotted their own baptism visitor who does some preparation with them and attends the christening. The only connection the vicar has with the families in advance of the baptism is during the phone call as they make the initial enquiry. However, there had been a deliberate effort to establish groups with which these families might engage:

> 'The link that we then try to make is through Messy Church. That's the main link. We've just had another review and one of the things that came up was perhaps we need to have another kind of link so we're thinking of doing a teddy bear's picnic once or twice a year. Hopefully the Mothers' Union will help with that. There are other links, there is a toddler group run by Mary and she co-ordinates the baptism visitors.'[284][285]

[283] G4.
[284] G13.
[285] Messy Church is a fresh expression of church for parents and children which was started in the Salisbury Diocese in 2004 by Lucy Moore. Variations on Moore's pattern have started throughout the country using the 'Messy Church' trademark. http://www.messychurch.org.uk/ [accessed 2/2/16].

In the initial phone call with the enquiring mother, Garry firstly established whether she either lived in the parish or had a genuine 'qualifying connection' which would allow the baptism to be in his church. 'My understanding of the rule is that you do anyone from the parish or electoral roll. But I'd go broader and apply the same qualifying connection as I would for a wedding.'[286] He was aware that he was increasingly taking calls from people who were just 'shopping around' and some who had already booked the party and were now trying to find a church to suit their times. He was finding this 'consumer driven' attitude difficult.

We talked about the liturgy, and Garry's frustrations with the liturgy the Church of England has on offer, which he thought did not connect with the people he was meeting:

> 'I've watched particularly the godparents' faces and their utter dismay at having to reject the devil and all rebellion against God.'[287]

The consequence of his discomfort was that he had written his own simplified liturgy.

> 'I use an experimental liturgy and the main message I want them to come away with is that the Church receives this child with joy. So it's thanksgiving for the arrival of the child and baptising and welcoming them into the family of the Church.'[288]

We went on to talk about the culture clash that happens when people who are not familiar with church attend a service or encounter those who are regular attenders. He thought this was partly about class. In his previous parish he found people particularly disengaged during baptism:

[286] G65.
[287] G28.
[288] G24.

> ‘We had people opening cans of lager and passing joints around. I just didn’t (pause). I felt that the Eucharist wasn’t the right vehicle for that. Yes. A massive cultural clash.’[289]

He observed that this current parish had more cultural links with the church and were generally more ‘well-behaved’. However he did suggest that (as at weddings) a third of congregations were not interested in the liturgy, while those closest to the family were more engaged.

We talked about the language used, while most people asked for ‘christening’ the website referred to ‘baptism’. Garry switched between both words, and was becoming more comfortable with doing that:

> ‘I used to think I would have never used the word christening as a good evangelical boy. But it’s a fight that I’m not fighting any more. The word Christ – en –ing isn’t the end of the world.’[290]

Throughout our conversation Garry was referring to weddings and drawing analogies between the baptism and wedding in social and liturgical terms. When I asked him about this, he was able to reflect on changes that he had observed throughout his ministry:

> ‘In my fifteen years of priesthood I’ve rarely married a couple who weren’t cohabiting. So for a lot of people the birth of their child is an excuse to have some kind of recognition obviously about the baptism of the child as well as the birth of their child. If they haven’t had a wedding perhaps it’s the

[289] G46.
[290] G54.

> first thing that marks them out as a couple in terms of front of the wider family community.'[291]

Although Garry expressed a frustration with the wordy services for baptism, as an evangelical he had accepted that infant baptism was part of his 'job' as a Church of England vicar although seeing it as the beginning of a journey with Christ rather than as a 'one off'. He himself had little contact with the families but he ensured that there were systems in place which meant each family got to know one member of the church well, and through this be drawn into relationship with the church. The Mothers' Union were especially important in this, sending cards on the anniversary of the child's christening until they were five. Despite all these efforts, he was still aware of a disconnect.

5.2 Helen: St Elfleda

The conversation began with Helen talking about the changes she was seeing as there was a lot of new-build so there were new and young families coming into the area. She described these families as 'aspiring'. She also noted that she was seeing couples and baptism families coming back to this church even though they lived elsewhere: 'There's a tie for people who belong here.'[292]

This had led to a growth in numbers of christenings, Helen said that she would be doing six the following month- all on one day as the first Sunday of the month was designated for christenings, and she would do three at the same time. Helen reflected on this throughout the conversation, aware that it was not ideal, but also wary because she did not want to overload those who assisted in this ministry. In this parish, she had not set up a baptism 'team' to do

[291] G68.
[292] H2.

preparation, instead preferring to have a conversation with the families at the time of booking and giving them some written information:

> 'I probably do more effective prep in that little bit of booking it. The number of times I've been to the house and they haven't even switched the telly off and they're not listening at all. I do feel really guilty about it if I'm honest but I just couldn't fit them all in.'[293]

Helen said that she had preferred to prioritise school work in the parish, and wondered if as a result of these efforts she was getting more baptisms from the mothers she had met in schools and with whom she had spent time. However, Helen was confident about the welcome the families received from herself and other members of the ministry team both at the initial enquiry stage and during the service itself.

> 'I do ask parents when they come to services like that, if they want some toys for them. Just that conversational style with them. I would never ever make them feel uncomfortable. The congregation are the same, they are incredibly welcoming.'[294]

Helen also described how the APA (Authorised Pastoral Assistant) ensured a welcome for the child through writing the name of each child baptised on to a child's hand print which was displayed in church:

> 'Round the font we have the names of all the babies who have been baptised so that people can pray for all the children. She tends to just keep it going. We started it off in the vestry we wanted the parents who were coming and waiting to know that we do care about these kids and we do pray for them.'[295]

[293] H56.
[294] H75.
[295] H67.

This hospitality and building of relationship were important themes throughout the conversation with Helen. However, she was aware that the large numbers attending baptisms were sometimes more difficult to manage with many of the guests, especially those not in the immediate family, being less engaged. In fact, 'some of them don't even seem interested in being there.'[296]

When I asked Helen why she thought the parents were bringing their children, she gave a number of answers, which she continued to reflect on. These can be summarised as follows.

i. 'I want to do the best for this little one, for this baby.'[297]
ii. 'I think that the baptism now is becoming the family event that seals the relationships. I don't see it as the wedding 'cos it's not.'[298]
iii. 'A lot of them say that they missed out on it when they were a baby. There's something about 'I don't want my bairn to miss out.' But I'm not sure if they know what they are missing out on.'[299]
iv. 'It's something about being special and being loved.'[300]
v. 'It's about the bigger picture and I sometimes feel that the church is just an excuse for the party afterwards.'[301]

Although she did not elaborate much on these reasons, Helen did tell a number of stories in order to make her point. One of these was a story from her previous parish about baptising a baby girl who was dying:

> 'The baptism was honest. I said all the way through that I had no doubt of God's love for the baby. Or that this baby was worth more than we'll ever know.
>
> For them the baptism was the wedding, the birthday party it was everything. I think there's something in that about God, there's an element of that even

[296] H95.
[297] H11.
[298] H20.
[299] H31.
[300] H32.
[301] H34.

> if people can't articulate that at baptism. This is something that is never going to happen again. This is something of God. You'll remember it at other parties. This party is never going to happen again. We're called back to remembrance. It's Easter. We're new and we're part of it.'[302]

Helen went on to tell me about the service itself. She aims to make it an enjoyable experience: 'if they're not listening to the formal words they might listen to some of the other bits.'[303] She said she had taken out the commission, instead, talking to the parents about ensuring that everyone who cares for the child is worthy of the responsibility and loves the child:

> 'I say to them whatever you've come for, my prayer is this. You might be thinking about you want wealth, riches, fame. But it is the quality of love which the child receives and brings into the family. The babies bring the love as much as everything else. So my job is for you to know about God's love as much as anything else.'[304]

5.3 Janet, St Ebba's

Although Janet had encouraged her congregation to participate in the questionnaire, providing opportunities for me to speak to them and to visit her parent and toddler group, she did not put me in touch with anyone to interview. This was partly because she had forgotten to ask the parents and partly because of the negative response of those whom she did ask:

> 'I did mention it to people a couple of times but I just got such reluctant vibes back from those people I mentioned it to, I just kind of backed off and said it was only an option if you wanted.'[305]

[302] H162/3.
[303] H128.
[304] H122/3.
[305] Ja5.

Janet was the last person I recruited to participate in the research: I invited her after encountering reluctance from other women priests. However, she did express some doubts at the time and during our conversation, I asked her about them:

> 'I was aware of feeling quite daunted that it always feels like a very messy area of ministry where there's a huge potential but huge mismatch between what I think I'm doing when I baptise your baby and what you think I'm doing. Such a lot of compromise and fudginess and I guess it feels like quite an insecure area of ministry. Perhaps I'm doing it all wrong I guess and you'll come in and see that I'm doing it all wrong.'[306]

Janet explained that the practice of infant baptism had challenged her previously well-ordered theology of baptism, 'Experience has shaped my theology and practice and I guess I think that as a good little evangelical I don't think it should work that way round although it clearly does.....'[307] In fact, she went on to say:

> 'If I was setting up the church of Janet from scratch I would baptise people who were old enough to know for themselves that was what they wanted and perhaps the children of believing signed up Christian parents. But we're not in that church.'[308]

Janet said that her church had an 'absolutely open' policy but did invite parents to attend a preparation session. She did visit families in their homes for a conversation if they could not attend, but her preference was for them to attend the session: 'It's a chance to meet the vicar, meet some of the people, see the church.'[309] It entails visiting the church, asking questions about it, discussing ideas about Jesus. Two or three members of the congregation attend

[306] Ja8.
[307] J10.
[308] J182.
[309] J18.

these preparation sessions, in order to welcome the families. Although she does baptisms for one family at a time several families are invited to these preparation sessions together. [310]

When I asked Janet why she thought people wanted to have their babies christened, she suggested there was an interweaving of motivations. The first of these was family tradition:

> 'Some people it's very much well I was done and my brother was done and grandma was done and this is our family tradition. This is what we do when we have a baby and this is how we mark it.'[311]

Other people had told her that they were keeping the baby's options open, so they could decide for themselves whether or not they wanted to be Christian when they grew up: 'I can't quite get my head round the logic of that.'[312]

Janet was sure that mothers wanted God's protection and blessing for their child and this reflected a sense of the divine rather than merely 'superstition':

> 'I sometimes think there's more about God going on than they can put into words to a complete stranger.'[313]

As we went on to talk about the ongoing relationship Janet had with her baptism families, we talked about that spiritual yearning which Janet perceives in them. While there are some families with whom the Church has an ongoing relationship –through activities such as the

[310] J159.
[311] J42.
[312] J44.
[313] J45.

toddler group or coffee mornings – there were many more with whom Janet thought she had not connected:

> 'I think there's something genuinely spiritual there, perhaps it's always there but I think it's closer to the surface, then and it sometimes feels as though they just want the water on the baby's head and thats all you ever wanted and that's fine. But sometimes it feels as though there is perhaps a connection to be made?'[314]

Janet thought choosing godparents was mainly about honouring close friendships or avoiding offending family members, 'I don't think there's much overlap between what the Church thinks about godparents and why people really choose them.'[315] She talked about families requesting large numbers of godparents - 'I just write really small in the register' – and the difficulty of rules restricting who is eligible to be a godparent, 'I've christened some small handful of adults who want to be christened so they can be a godparent and that's a whole other area of messiness. I'm even less sure what I think about that.'[316]

Although Janet observed that both parents come to the preparation, it is usually the mother who makes the first contact with her. She thought that the views of grandmothers were influential so she invited them to the preparation as well. She commented on the now rather outdated tradition of the grandmother not allowing the unbaptised infant into her house. Despite this, Janet did not think that the parents were put under pressure to bring their child to baptism but rather that it represented a tradition in their family to which they adhered willingly.

[314] J65.
[315] J70.
[316] J92.

Janet described the liturgy she had been using as 'quite pruned', but she preferred to use this than the unwieldy formal liturgy. But still, she thought it might not be easy to connect with.[317] She also 'shoved in some element of thanksgiving for the child although this is not part of the liturgy'. She talked about the welcome from the church congregation - only one or two of whom stayed for the service, again she felt this was not ideal:

> 'I would prefer it if more came. Because we're saying we welcome you into the church except the church all went home an hour ago. I get the church as involved as it can with meeting them and at the preparation.'[318]

Throughout our conversation, Janet expressed her discomfort with various aspects of the baptism service and the church's relationship with those attending. She referred to mismatches throughout: in the liturgy; in the attitude of the congregation; in her espoused theology and practice, 'There's a mismatch between the beliefs that are deep down.'[319]

5.4 Mark, St Cuthbert's Church

I interviewed Mark on two separate occasions, the second time in order to clarify some of the points he raised earlier. In the first interview we began by talking about some of the folk customs he had encountered in the working class parishes in the North East in which he had worked. He particularly remembered being asked to do baptisms within days of the birth, regardless of the day of the week.[320] He talked about that again in the second interview, arguing that there was a movement among evangelical clergy in the 1970s to stop any hint of 'folk' religion, and so make membership of the church more exclusive and perhaps also more

[317] J185.
[318] J162.
[319] J166.

onerous. Mark thought this had distanced many ordinary people from the church, but that the church should be caring for 'all souls' without asking questions:

> 'I've always said 'Yes'. 'Can I get married?' 'Yes.' Can I get my child baptised?' 'Yes.' 'Yes'. I can't understand why people would say anything other.'[321]

He continued to talk about folk religion as being an expression of connection which might be well articulated by an educated person but more honestly expressed by someone who is less articulate:

> 'This folk religion stuff is about truth. If it's about truth. If it's just me, just me. If you haven't got a Christian story, a faith story. That's why people do family trees and stuff, so they can see how they link. They have these belongings, these big parades, a minute's silence at football. So how am I linked to everyone else? It's about connection.'[322]

As he explained this, he expressed concern that other clergy placed boundaries in the way of people who wished to be baptised through their inflexibility. He suggested that because parish boundaries were historic, he would prefer not to place restrictions of any kind in the way of those requesting baptism. In the second interview, he described how people come into his church from across the city, 'And they walk in and think this is wonderful, this is where we want our children baptised.'[323]

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[320] MJ17 (The letters J and O refer to the June and October interviews).
[321] MJ25.
[322] MO58 -62.
[323] M93.

As he talked about the couples he met, he suggested that their coming to baptism expressed their desire to be a family and to provide an ethical upbringing for their child which would include baptism and might include their attendance at a church school. He said that baptism was about 'connection between ourselves and between God and between family.'[324]

In the second interview I began by asking Mark about the increase in numbers of baptisms he had seen in the twelve years he had been in his current position. Mark thought it was both because he was approachable and because he does only one baptism at a time on a day to suit the family. He believed that guests attending included more friends than when he started his ministry:

> 'That family thing was big before so like I say they get the peer group and they get all their friends to come. So there used to be mainly families and some friends but now it's mainly friends.'[325]

He talked about developing relationships with those on the edge of church –many of the christenings were as result of weddings he had taken or because someone had attended a service as a guest and decided they would like to have their own child baptised at this church. He observed that although there is no formal way of the 'church' family relating to the baptism families, his church members were 'really welcoming.'

When I asked why he thought people were coming to have their babies baptised, Mark replied that it had changed throughout his ministry. It had been something about 'Grandma'

[324] M79.
[325] MO104.

saying 'they'll go to hell if they are not baptised.'[326] But now, he thought people saw it as being a kind of thanksgiving service.

> 'Now the interesting thing for the church and us is that I believe it's written in people's hearts and I believe people believe in God, whatever God is, and they do want to keep their link to their families and they want that blessing and being part of something which they believe. And the difficulty we have of course is that they don't see it necessarily as coming to church every week and belonging to the church family.'[327]

Although Mark had been enthusiastic about participating in the research, his church only returned two questionnaires and he did not put me in touch with anyone to interview. The following excerpt from our conversation reveals this as being an area of ministry in which he feels vulnerable:

> **'I know you didn't send me people to interview and I'd like to explore that. Had you forgotten?**
>
> Since you asked me we've had no first children baptised, we've had some others and it's been great, we had one which would've been great.
>
> *Pause*
>
> Do you know it's that step really of saying do you know would you mind just talking to Allison for an hour. And you know we've just get a feeling sometimes. Should I be asking them or not asking them. Is that too big a commitment for them?
>
> **Are you frightened that by asking the question you do some damage in that relationship?**
>
> Yes. You know we've come for baptism and now you're asking us to do a study.'[328]

He went on to say:

[326] M42.
[327] M48.
[328] MO61 – 67.

> ‘This is my chance to do something that as a bit of evangelism and a bit of mission. I don’t think it’s lack of trust in you.’[329]

5.5 Rob: St Bede’s

Rob was another of the priests in the study who had not passed on any mothers for me to have conversations with. He accounted for it by saying that he had asked several people who had ‘fobbed him off’ and were obviously reluctant. Others he had chosen not to ask: ‘Some of the people it’s been like pulling teeth even to get them to talk to me about what they think baptism is.’[330] We talked about the difficulty I was having in finding women from deprived communities like his parish willing to talk to me. He thought that the clergy were considered to be remote and so the mothers found it difficult to relate to him in any way:

> ‘I think there is a fear of meeting new people and being asked difficult questions. There’s a fear of coming to see the vicar and there was certainly one who I asked who said I’ve told you what I think already. But I said, I thought you’d want to give more detail. It’s difficult.’[331]

He talked about the issue of making long-term relationships so building trust between the church and the community, importantly the work of a team rather than the responsibility of the vicar. He was beginning to think about how he might set up a team from the church for this pastoral work: ‘I think the key is getting the congregation involved – they are local people like themselves.’[332] He was trying not to fall into patterns of relationship where the vicar is thought of as somehow ‘better’ than others, and thought that baptism was about acknowledging the individual as important:

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[329] MJ77.
[330] R8.
[331] R23.
[332] R29.

> ‘I think what we’re probably trying to do in the baptism service is to build people up and to say yes you are important. When we make the sign of the cross with the holy oil, this is what happened with the queen 60 years ago. Then you’ve been put down so much that you want to be built up. The world say one thing but the church and God and are saying something very different. I think that’s important for people to hear.’[333]

We went on to talk about the sense of connection people from that area feel to that particular place, so that even when they move away they think St Cuthbert’s is the church with which they maintain their connection, especially as many will still have extended family living nearby. ‘You might expect that to be more rural. The local village community. But actually it’s the same here.’[334]

I asked if Rob thought the actual party was as important as some people might suggest: ‘I think they are wanting to celebrate life’. He had recently been taking a booking for a baptism a year ahead and thought that might be so that they could save up for the party:

> ‘They are saving up and it takes the place of the wedding and I think that’s why I’m not as cynical. There’s something about celebrating the relationship. Although that’s not going to be in a marriage.’[335]

The Church had recently changed its policy in order to do each baptism individually, so that a quiet family need not be disturbed by a boisterous family. He thought this had meant that the quality of the services was better:

[333] R32.
[334] R50.
[335] R66.

> ‘For the parents there is something happening. There is an intensity of them listening to everything and taking it in. Not for everyone. And I think there is something of God in that. I don’t think they would be able verbalise what is going on or what they are thinking about. I mean we find it difficult enough don’t we?’[336]

Rob told me about the process families go through when they are first booking a baptism. Firstly they make contact with him either over the phone or by calling at the vicarage, then he meets with them, goes through the paperwork and talks through the service. The family are invited to go to church on the Sunday before the baptism in order to be welcomed by the congregation. This makes a connection between the family and the congregation. At the baptism itself one or two parishioners attend and this helps to emphasise the connection.

Rob also described how difficult it was to do baptism preparation which did not feel like a series of questions which made the family defensive. ‘I’ve tried to have a conversation rather than just asking questions which I think makes them defensive. I’ve taken them through the service and given them a copy to take to the godparents. It is trying to get them to verbalise something so they actually know what they are signing up to without feeling judged....There’s a feeling that the vicar is asking questions ’cos he doesn’t quite believe that you want it for the right reasons.’[337]

We went on to discuss the role of the godparents and the promises they would be making. We also talked about the rules of godparents being at least baptised, and the number of godparents requested:

[336] R74.
[337] R79.

> ‘Because I sometimes get adults who ask to be baptised in order to be a godparent somewhere else. I say to them that I can’t unless they are prepared to make their own commitment. With a child they haven’t got that. You know that most parents and godparents aren’t going to bring their child back to church.’[338]

I asked Rob if he thought it was the mother’s job to ensure that the child was christened. He thought it was likely to be the duty of the mother and, especially for single mothers, the choice of the mother:

> ‘I think it falls upon the mother whether it is her job or not. They tend to have more say when it comes to children. If the mother isn’t religious, then the Father probably gives in more. If the mother is from the religious background but the father isn’t it’ll still be baptised.’[339]

Repeatedly Rob expressed his conviction that although tradition, expectation and perhaps even superstition played a part in the decision of parents to have their children baptised, there was less compulsion for this than there had been in previous generations, and they were expressing something of God as they brought their children, ‘an acknowledgement of human life tied up with some ideas about God.’[340]

5.6 Sheila: St Hilda

I had worked closely with Sheila at the beginning of the research and had conversations with parents and grandparents at her toddler group in the first stages of the research. However, she had not passed on any mothers with whom I could have an in-depth conversation. During the interview she explained that she had quite forgotten about it, passing most of her pastoral

[338] R89.
[339] R132.
[340] R73.

offices on to colleagues. I asked if she thought that the parents felt somewhat embarrassed about the motives for coming for christening so did not want to be questioned on it:

> 'I don't think they are embarrassed. I think they'd be upset if I questioned them too closely. So they think this is their church it's their right and a rite of passage that they are going to have. I tread carefully around the why, I do always ask although they don't always answer.'[341]

She went on to describe how the people of the community see the church as theirs, the place they come to celebrate transitions and family. Sheila told me the story of a young girl who had asked if she might speak at the baptism, Sheila recalls:

> 'She said, 'Yes I want to speak'. And she stood up and she said, 'As you know it's been difficult year but I've come out of it now and as you know we are here today to celebrate the future.' So she had the idea that this marked a transition from a difficult year into a hopeful future and she wanted to celebrate that. And she hasn't been back to church but for her that particular moment was important.'[342]

Sheila also told me the story of a couple who had been married in a civil ceremony on a Saturday but came to church the next morning to have their baby baptised, 'I think that that baptism was almost the churching of the wedding. It made connections that hadn't been made in a civic ceremony.'[343]

This led us to a discussion about the baptism being described as 'The New Wedding', Sheila considered this is an unhelpful phrase as it seemed dismissive. She expressed concern that weddings had become too expensive for many, 'the poorer you are the grander the wedding

[341] S11.
[342] S16.
[343] S22.

you want.'[344] However, this could only be a partial explanation for their wish to have their children baptised:

> 'It's marking a new family, it's marking a new beginning. It's not about the couple only but it's about the family and the interconnections within the larger family. There are lots of long conversations about who will be the godparents.'[345]

Sheila went on to talk about a family who had returned for baptisms as new members of the family had been born:

> 'There was a sense of this is what we do as a family, it becomes a pattern, it becomes how the Smiths celebrate a birth, it becomes a family history.'[346]

As we went on to talk about the liturgy, Sheila said that her tag-line is 'God is love' and it is this which is part of the miracle of birth. She said that she found some parts of the liturgy too wordy so emphasised the symbols instead: 'Those symbols of water and candles and movement I use liturgically because the actual words are pretty tough.'[347]

Sheila's preparation involved meeting the parents and godparents usually on the Friday evening before the christening, explaining the service and talking about Jesus. Although she has described it to the family as a rehearsal, she uses it as an occasion for teaching:

[344] S56.
[345] S28.
[346] S34.
[347] S40.

> ‘I want them there so I can say why I think they are there. I think they deserve to know and what the promises are. If you make a promise it’s a serious thing. They don’t giggle so much on a Sunday because then they are not embarrassed because they don’t know how to behave. And then they see you taking them seriously.’[348]

Her expectation would not be that the families would come to church afterwards – although some do. Rather, she might see them at the toddler group which they run on Monday mornings, or on Christmas Eve. She also thought that her work in schools helped to forge links with christening families. When she had first arrived, a number of couples had asked to renew their vows, and had done so wearing white and with bridesmaids, ‘in a way finishing off their wedding.’[349]

> **‘I wonder if this revisiting is about doing it right –being respectable. I wonder if it’s the same with a baptism, something about I’ve got this baby and I want to be the best mother?**
>
> I think you are right and therefore you would dress up and so would your friends, wear your heels and your best frock. Especially in the winter I’ll have to say Come into church and come in and sit down cos they are freezing. It is about being the best. And everybody brings a gift. There will be lots and lots of beautifully wrapped gifts for the child. There’s always a party even if granny just makes the sandwiches and it’s in her house. Sometimes it’s in the local pub and mums and grans do the catering for that.’[350]

I went on to ask Sheila if she thought that a female priest made a difference to meaning-making in the baptism service. In response she told me about baptising her grandson, during which she had felt a very deep, maternal connection to him. She went on to discuss some of the iconography around motherhood and the Virgin Mary:

[348] S50.
[349] S55.
[350] S57 -59.

> ‘There are links about the powerful images of women, but I don’t think that people having their babies christened can make those links.....But these working class girls just have never been encouraged to speak about that sort of thing. They just get on with it. They do. That’s why the ritual works so well in that service, whereas hearing, articulating, absorbing, the women ‘do’ – they make pies and the cakes and they create babies. They create stuff.’[351]

5.7 Analysis of Interviews

All of the clergy with whom I talked expressed some sort of dilemma as they responded to the baptism requests of young mothers when they seemed to be expressing little Christian commitment. Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation and welcome into the church family, a means of bestowing a Christian identity and although these clergy welcomed any parent who asked, they might have felt it to be undervalued – certainly Helen’s parishioner who complained about the lack of respect felt this way. [352]

All the clergy here expressed a level of discomfort with their baptism practice, although some were able to make more coherent sense of it than others. Most found this difficult, Janet calling it a ‘fudge’ and, in a sense, my questions exposed their vulnerability in managing their own expectations of baptism, those of the ‘Church’ and those (often only perceived) of the participants.

The complexity which Janet observes manifests itself in different ways. It may be that it represents something of the church in transition. For as the Church of England declines in numbers and, as the number of christenings even in the busiest parishes declines, so clergy begin to question their relevance. In discussing my research topic with my clergy peers, their

[351] S86 -89.
[352] H100.

response has been almost unanimous in hoping for a solution to an issue which causes concern. Andrew Irvine, writing about clergy stress, says, 'The clergy is caught in the cross fire of the church in transition'[353] To some extent this conflict is reflected in these conversations with clergy.

5.7a Mediators of Meaning

In his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim argued that religion functions to stabilise society, so the rituals through which this is symbolised become the carriers of meaning. Priests in this Durkheimian view are thus mediators – operating between the realms of the sacred and the profane.[354] Durkheim identified elements of religion which are common across different cultures. In doing so, he observed the separation of different aspects of life, physical things, and certain behaviours into two categories which he called the *sacred* and the *profane*. Things and behaviour which are considered *sacred* belong to the spiritual or religious realm. Everything else in the world, that is, those things without religious or sacred significance were categorised as profane. These two categories are rigidly defined and separate: 'The two worlds are not only conceived of as separate, but even as hostile and jealous rivals of each other.'[355] Yet these domains interact with one another and are mutually dependent. However this interaction is firmly boundaried by taboo and systems of interdictions: 'A man cannot enter into intimate relations with sacred things except after ridding himself of all that is profane in him.'[356]. Priests are those who have been 'set aside' by society in order to be enabled to have contact with the sacred. It is they who can cross this border without breaking taboo.

[353] Andrew R Irvine, *Between Two Worlds: Understanding and Managing Clergy Stress* (London: Mowbray, 1997), p.67.
[354] W.S.F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: James Clark and Co. Ltd), p.141.
[355] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin), p.39.
[356] Durkheim, p.309.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown the ways in which the clergy are mediating between these two worlds, the sacred and profane, which are key to meaning making for individuals and society. As the clergy seek to break down barriers, to honour the stories of the mothers and families, to allow themselves to be brought into family narratives, so they are operating in the space between two worlds. This space is space of fragility and vulnerability where worlds of meaning may collide, coalesce or overlap.

As Helen described the baptism of a dying baby, she interpreted the performance of the ritual according to the norms of the sacred, and yet her comments suggest she was aware of the intersection of two worlds. As Helen holds the baby amidst the family celebration so she embodies the sacred: as the dying child is held by the priest so the symbolic intersection of life and death is embodied. The taboos which Durkheim describes indicate that this role could only be carried out by the priest, but at the same time the child herself is sacred: set apart as the initiate in the ritual and as the one who is dying.

Of course this is a story in extremis, which highlights the role of the clergy as they take the child for baptism, separating her and bringing her into the sacred world. Most of the clergy want to use words to explain the ritual actions – disappointed that the liturgical words available to them seem inadequate – and seemingly unaware (with the exception of Sheila) of the powerful symbols at work as the priest takes hold of the baby bringing her into sacred space.

5.7b Developing Relationship

The clergy here express a desire to welcome and encourage those who bring their babies to be baptised. They hope to honour the meaning-making of families at the same time as seeking to explain their own understanding. None of the clergy expressed any desire to dismiss those whom they were baptising: Helen 'put off' those from outside the parish by making them 'wait'[357] and Garry refused to be 'conned' into baptising at the whim of the parents.[358] Most thought that the parents they encountered had some experience of God, either through the birth or within the service itself. Both Helen and Garry talked about a lack of attentiveness among some of the guests which contrasted with the attentiveness of the family and closer circle of friends.[359]

The clergy in this study are doing more than merely viewing the baptism request as an opportunity for 'instruction' where the lowly mother is given the 'correct' view of the Christian faith. Rather, they engage with the mothers (and sometimes fathers) as mediators of meaning. Although, Sheila perhaps, is keen to use it as an opportunity for teaching: 'I want them there so I can say why I think they are there.'[360] The clergy here are acknowledging a person's belief that they already belong to the family of the Church because of their own baptism and they welcome them with respect as people who, at the very least, have an interest in the Christian faith, however inarticulate, and a desire to pass that on to future generations.

[357] H43.
[358] G22.
[359] G51.
[360] S51.

In fact, many of the clergy are reluctant to enforce a policy of preparation preferring to talk with the women they encounter themselves, or in Garry's case, to ensure those conversations happen through the support of a baptism team.[361] St Ebba's church has the most formal baptism preparation of the few churches in this study, but again, it starts with discussion.

Although the clergy I talked to were balancing time constraints, all were aware of the need to develop ongoing relationships with the families. They recognised that even though regular church attendance is declining, the Church still has an important part to play in the lives of young mothers (most of their contact was with mothers rather than fathers). While acknowledging that Sunday morning church might not attract young families (Mark was clear that bringing a crying baby to church is unhelpful[362]) they were all at varying stages of seeking alternative ways of engaging these young parents.

Nevertheless, this might reflect an anxiety on the behalf of the clergy with declining Sunday congregations. They are constantly urged by their bishop to 'grow' their church.[363] This anxiety may be linked to the 'success criteria' being used by the individual; if success is measured only by the numbers of people in church, clergy are bound to be disappointed, even though they may be realistic as is Mark, 'Baptisms never give you a return on people coming to church.'[364] The constant publishing of data showing decline in church attendance has a demoralising effect upon the clergy. Gill observes that 'Decline threatens our ministry and our own status as ministers.'[365]

[361] G12.
[362] MO54.
[363] Durham Diocese vision strategy.
[364] MO55.
[365] Robin Gill, *Beyond Decline: A Challenge to the Churches* (London: SCM, 1988), p.65.

All of the clergy talked about further developing relationship between the church and the mothers they met for baptism. For Helen this was through school[366], for Janet, Garry and Helen this was through toddler group or 'Messy Church' (or both)[367]. Only Mark and Rob did not have anything like this in place although both had discussed it within their PCCs. Mark in particular speaks of this with regret, 'We could have grown. Two or three years ago. The issue was how do we nurture those children in church and interestingly enough the church just did not want it in that sense.'[368] And reflecting on those families with whom St Ebba's has retained a relationship comments, 'They aren't really part of us and help us pay our parish share or whatever.'[369]

However, I think the vulnerability of the clergy was being more strongly expressed by those who had not put mothers in contact with me.[370] It seems that they had realised, even having agreed to participate, that they were so uncertain about their standing with these new mothers and possible congregants, and aware of how easily they could discourage them with far-reaching pastoral consequences, that they were reluctant even to invite mothers to meet me. It suggests that the conflicts they carry, and which have been highlighted as I have explored the data has meant a loss of confidence. The main sources of conflict they experience are between: traditional congregations and the unchurched but interested; the institutional Church's need for growth and the parish churches resistance to change; traditional theological teaching on baptism and the desire to enable all those who ask to share God's grace. As pastoral theologian Wesley Carr points out, there is pain in this ministry:

[366] H39.
[367] G13, J61, S54.
[368] G52.
[369] J62.
[370] Elaine Campbell-Reid and Christian Scharen have written about the vulnerability of clergy in Practical Theology research, describing in depth the methods they used for interviewing for their project 'Learning Pastoral Imagination'. They argue that ethnographic interviewing is 'Holy Ground' in their paper, 'Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing is Practical Theological Work', *International Journal for Practical Theology*, Vol. 17: 2, (2013), 232 – 259.

> Whatever happens and whatever policies churches may adopt about such religion, pastors have to hold to the fact that uncertainty, disarray, emotional disturbances and even unbelief, as these are represented by those coming for such ministry, is more disturbing to the pastor than he or she probably realizes. If this is understood, at least ministers may not fall too easily into the trap of projecting this disarray into the vulnerable and dealing with it there. The pains of such ministry are born by the minister.[371]

5.7c Breaking down barriers

All of the clergy in my study referred (without any prompting) to the parochial system with its ancient parish boundaries being, as Mark pointed out, almost obsolete. Canon Law within the Church of England gives all baptised members the right to have their children baptised in their local parish church. It does not account for those who think the church is theirs but who live elsewhere. Clergy referred to requests they have received from people who live outside the parish but retain a spiritual and social connection to that place: Helen refers to a family from Australia[372]; Sheila to a family living in Scotland[373]; Janet talks about those whose social networks cross parish boundaries so people might attend a toddler group in one parish even while they live in another.[374] To those who feel a tie to 'their' church, parish boundaries may be perceived as meaningless and arbitrary.

Mark and Garry both mentioned a 'qualifying connection' which may be referred to when making decisions about requests for baptism.[375] This 'Qualifying Connection' was introduced in 2008 to enable clergy to manage requests for weddings more

[371] Wesley Carr, *Handbook of Pastoral Studies* (London: SPCK, 1997), p.223.
[372] H2.
[373] S70.
[374] J22.
[375] MO96, G64.

sympathetically.[376] It does not apply in any formal way to baptisms, but does seem to offer an unofficial route for clergy to respond to requests with pastoral sensitivity. Although Garry expressed some frustration that a family had recently tried to 'con' him into allowing them to have the service on a Saturday,[377] these clergy all wanted to be able to be welcoming: 'I've always said yes!'[378]

Most of the clergy I talked to operated an 'open' baptism policy, ('I would never turn anyone away from the parish.'[379]) although they referred to other clergy whose closed policies left them feeling frustrated – as they then baptised the babies who had been 'rejected' from elsewhere. Mark relates to this obliquely as he suggests the 'demands' the priests make on families puts them off.[380] Janet refers to a decision taken among her deanery colleagues to allow a crossing of parish boundaries as would make sense in an urban context.[381] Rob expresses his disappointment and anger with a neighbour whom he thinks creates destructive barriers:

> 'We get one that's on the parish boundary where they won't baptise if the parents aren't married. And my neighbour and I get quite a lot of fall out from that. But if these families have bothered to look for somewhere else why should we put brick a wall in the way?'[382]

Several of these clergy also talked about the restrictions placed on those allowed to be godparents who ought (according to canon B23[383]) to be both baptised and confirmed. None were concerned that the godparents were confirmed nor did they ever check that they were

[376] Details of the measure can be found on the website of the faculty office of the Archbishop of Canterbury: http://www.facultyoffice.org.uk/special-licences/general-information-about-marriage-law/legal-entitlements-to-marry-in-a-churchresidencechurch-electoral-roll-membership-and-qualifying-connections/ [accessed 20/1/16].
[377] G22.
[378] MJ28.
[379] G64.
[380] MO24.
[381] J22.
[382] R81.
[383] As summarised by Gilly Myers in *Using Common Worship: Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p.38.

baptised, in fact, Rob said he would accept only one godparent being baptised, 'for pastoral reasons'.[384] Janet and Rob expressed reticence about baptising adults because they wanted to be godparents – in fact Rob tried to put them off.[385] Helen and Mark were less uncomfortable about this practice.[386]

The six clergy in this study all did baptisms late on a Sunday morning after their main Sunday worship. Only Helen did not do services for one baby at a time because she did not want to overload her team, although 'we do try to accommodate people.'[387] The reason most of the clergy had taken the decision was so that they can accommodate different types of family together, fit more guests into the church building, and in the cases of Sheila and Garry, tailor the service to meet the needs of a particular family.

Rob , Sheila and Helen, all talked about the vulnerability of the relationship with the mothers coming to them which has led them to believe it would be wrong to subject them to any pressure or too many questions, 'There's a feeling that the vicar is always asking questions because he doesn't quite believe you want it for the right reasons.'[388] Rob describes the fear on the faces of the mothers as they approach him: he lives in the biggest and most secluded house in his neighbourhood and is aware of the barrier this creates with his parishioners expecting him to be, therefore, 'above' them.

[384] R89.
[385] J92.
[386] H57, MO39.
[387] H45.
[388] R79.

As these clergy talked to me about how they chat to the families they encounter – about football, clothes, who's making the 'tea' - and work hard to adapt an unwieldy liturgy with jokes, splashing and children's stories, I have been struck by how much time and energy they put into breaking down the barriers which might prohibit the mothers and families who approach them from relationship not just with them, or the church, but with God. Perhaps it is Janet who expresses this most clearly:

> 'We want to be a church that says you want to bring your children to God how can we make that possible? Bring your children to Jesus. Yes. The rules seem so arbitrary.'[389]

5.8 Conclusion

While the aim of my research has been to attend to the muted voices of mothers, this chapter, focussing on clergy, has thickened the ethnography. I have shown that the clergy, too, are key participants in the rite of baptism not just 'keepers of the sacred', but also as they seek to express pastoral care in the parishes even when it seems to be hindered by rules. They express their hopes that in baptism the child is developing a relationship with God and identity as a Christian. As I pursue the concept of identity in the following chapter, I will argue that for the mothers, baptism is more likely to be a marker of cultural identity rather than Christian identity as the clergy here have suggested.

[389] J97.

Chapter 6: Identity and Belonging in Baptism

Having listened to the stories of mothers and clergy involved in the rite of baptism and so identified the important themes for this research, in this chapter and those which follow, I will begin to offer an interpretation. The clergy I spoke to were confident that baptism offers the child a Christian identity, and here I shall develop the concept of identity. I shall argue that, for mothers, baptism is important to their children's social and familial identity. Engaging with sociologies and psychologies of culture, I will further develop the concept of identity and what it means for the mothers in my research.

For theologians, baptism indicates a new identity in Christ: that is, as salvation from original sin. This doctrine was influenced strongly by Augustine who argued that since, 'they committed at that age no sins in their own life, there remains only original sin.'[390] Johannes Quasten summarises Augustine's theology which suggests that baptism; 'Gives protection from the power of evil, it brings release from the condemnation that entered the world through Adam; and it offers the loving support of the church community.'[391] The baptisand participates in Christ's death and resurrection, so becoming identified with Christ in a new life as a Christian. As Earey observes, 'Baptism is increasingly recognised as the sacrament of spiritual rebirth and of welcome into the church.....'[392] The new identity of baptism, from the perspective of ancient and current theologians, is, then, as a Christian.

Although this traditional theology of baptism indicates that baptism conveys a new identity in Christ, in this chapter I shall show that in the ritual, the community and the materiality of

[390] Roland J., Teske, *The works of St Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-first Century, Answer to the Pelagians* (Hyde Park, New York: New York City Press, 1997), p.56.
[391] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* vol. 2 (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1986), p.807.
[392] Mark Earey, *Worship that Cares: An Introduction to Pastoral Liturgy* (Norwich: SCM, 2012), p.81.

christening, the infant begins to gain social identity. The exploration of the 'meaning' of christening is, then, closely linked to the search for identity, 'the search for identity is rooted in finding meaning.'[393] The consideration of identity by sociologists and anthropologists alike builds on both the work of Durkheim and Erikson[394]. Research on identity has been far-reaching but identity is, in essence, about the ability to make meaning of one's own self.[395]

6.1 Identity

The development of identity occurs within relationships – with individuals, with society even with the 'other'. Sociologist Stuart Hall defines identity as 'the essential centre of the self'[396] which is formed in dialogue with external cultural worlds. He argues that identity is related to culture, which lacks stability, causing unstable identities which may be fragmented.[397] Hall's account of identity as fluid reflects that proposed by Bauman and would suggest that identity is not a fact of birth, but reflects an uncertainty of self in a culture where people are inclined to swap identities, and resist commitments to individuals or community. It suggests that individuals have opportunities for making choices and for resisting expectations. However, this post-modern view suggests, as Bauman himself points out, that subjects believe they have a choice. Bauman, argues that the self-awareness and questioning which comprise this meaning seeking are not only a characteristic of post-modernity, but also of privilege, 'After all, asking 'who you are' makes sense to you only once you believe you can

[393] David M Bell, 'Development of the Religious Self' in *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, Identity* ed. by Abby Day, (ed), (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 127 – 142, p.139.
[394] Erik H Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1950).
[395] David Bell, p.127.
[396] Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity' in *Modernity and its Futures*, ed. by Stuart Hall, David Held, Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 273-326, p.275.
[397] Stuart Hall, 'Who needs Identity?' in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. by Paul du Gay and Jessica Evans, (London: Sage, 2003), p.17.

be someone other than you are only if you have a choice, and only if it depends on you what you choose...'[398] As Bradley observes, 'Identities are not free floating.'[399]

Hall suggests the term 'identification' is more useful than 'identity': 'In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin, or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.'[400] It is about recognising and naming the 'Other' which is necessary for the recognition of the self. Identification is not static, he argues, it is about becoming rather than being.

In developing an understanding of 'identity' Robert Linton, in 1936, observed the concepts of 'ascribed status' and 'achieved status.'[401] Foladore, in an article attempting to clarify their meaning, writes, 'accident of birth determines an individual's 'ascribed statuses' and performance or effort or volition determine his 'achieved statuses.'[402] Foladore uses the example of baptism to suggest how these statuses differ: 'If an infant were baptised and raised in a particular religion without any volition on his part his religion would be 'ascribed status'; if, as an adult, he converted to a different religion [this] …..would be 'achieved status.'[403] However, he goes on to argue religion to be ascribed status because although conversion may take place, 'it is not expected to take place in the normative American society.'[404] On the whole (although there are exceptions) ascribed status is expected to be irreversible. In the time since both Linton and Foladore were writing, society has changed;

[398] Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p.19.
[399] Harriet Bradley, *Fractured Identities: Changing Patterns of Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007 [1996]), p.212.
[400] Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?', p.16.
[401] Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction* (London: Peter Owen, 1936).
[402] Irving S Foladare, 'A Clarification of 'Ascribed Status' and 'Achieved Status', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 10:1, (1969), 53 – 61, p.53.
[403] Foladore, p.53.
[404] Foladore, p.60.

Giddens wrote about the turn to the post-modern during the nineteen eighties. However, I would argue that for many of the women participating in my study who are from closed working class communities, identity continues to be, to a large extent, ascribed: that is, they do not see the possibility of change.

If in having their babies christened, mothers are indeed either (or both) confirming the identity of their children or conferring identity upon them, this would suggest a certainty and sense of belonging which is non-negotiable. This is more akin to Hall's idea of identification than Bauman's post-modern definition of identity. However, Bauman does write about an 'underclass' – 'exiled to the netherland out of the bounds of society.'[405] These are the people who do not have access to the choices or negotiated social space which leads to an 'absence of identity'. Most of the parishes participating in my study could be described as partly comprising these 'netherlands' where individuality has been eroded. In such places, then, the choices from which post-modern identities are built are not available. But yet, the people living in such places continue to seek to have their babies christened: this could be construed as an act of defiance in the face of institutional indifference or perhaps as an act of belonging. 'If you 'belong', you don't really ask about your identity'.[406]

Helen told me about a young Muslim who had approached her to ask for christening for her child. She had attended a private church school and was seeking that cultural belonging for her own child:

[405] Bauman, p.63.
[406] Bauman, p.9.

> ‘She said does it matter if I’m a Muslim? She’d been brought up in N school. She said I have got quite a good grounding in christianity. But I would like her to be a Christian. Ironically I was watching her father and he was more actively saying it. She wanted her little one to fit into the culture she’d been brought up in. It was a cultural decision as well as religious. I think it had a lot to do with her feeling on the edge of culture.’[407]

6.2 Naming

Ziff, writing in 1960, sees baptismal rites as the required way of assigning identity[408] through the giving of a name. Bourdieu similarly suggests that it is through this naming that, ‘a constant and durable social entity is instituted.’[409] So christening may be considered to be a ceremony of naming in a public space, and in that naming giving the child an identity which will be socially recognised. The name locates the child socially and culturally, but also within a particular family.[410] Hagström explores the importance of naming for identity, observing, ‘A person’s own name is important because it distinguishes her as a unique person and identifies her as herself.’[411]

However, liturgists are at pains to point out that baptism is not a naming ceremony: Johnson explains the lack of reference to naming in the modern liturgies, ‘since baptism is not a naming ceremony, the continued use of the prayer book formula ‘name this child’ would cause confusion and is not in keeping with the theology of the sacrament.’[412] Nevertheless, despite the written liturgies having no reference to naming, in several of the baptisms I

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[407] H113.
[408] Paul Ziff, *Semantic Analysis* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp.102- 4.
[409] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* trans by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson *(*Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.224.
[410] Marie Laing refers to this as ‘forging a bond through time’, in ‘*Naming our Child’* University of Alberta, p.263, http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/pandp/article/viewFile/14965/11786 [accessed 27/6/13].
[411] Charlotte Hagström, ‘Naming me, Naming you: Personal Names, Online Signatures and Cultural Meaning’ in *Names and Identities*, *Oslo Studies in Language* 4:2, (2012), 81-93. www.journals.uio.no/index.php/osla/article/view/312/437 [accessed 25/9/15].
[412] Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1999), p.170.

observed, the priest did ask for the children's name while at the font. The Roman Catholic Rite for the Baptism of Infants includes an explicit naming element at the start of the liturgy, and although this has been criticised by Anglican liturgists,[413] it clearly marks the relationship of baptism to birth and the conferring of identity.

Although several of the questionnaire respondents referred to naming as being an important element of the christening, this was less important for the mothers to whom I talked whose children were, on the whole, much older. That is, they were already inhabiting their name. Emily and I talked about the naming ceremonies she had attended as a guest and about which she was dismissive, 'What's the point in a naming ceremony cos they're named the moment you give birth aren't they?'[414]

6.3 Belonging

Several questionnaire responses involved the idea of belonging – to the church itself (as a place as much as a body of people), to the church community, or 'family', and to the related family, or kin. I would suggest that the baptism rite is a rite of intensification which confirms that belonging and reinforces the sharing of core values. Davies writes:

> Closely linked with both rites of passage and rites of intensification is the theme of sacrifice and the giving and taking of life-force as a medium for dealing with both the core values and emotions of a community.[415]

[413] See particularly Johnson, p.265*;* Mark Searle, 'Infant Baptism Reconsidered', in *Alternative Futures for Worship' vol 2, Baptism and Confirmation,* ed. by Mark Searle (Collegeville; The Liturgical Press, 1987), p.37.
[414] Em96.
[415] Douglas J. Davies, *Emotion Identity and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity and Otherness,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.37.

It seems that the 'community' is less likely to be the usual church congregation than those who have gathered specifically to be part of that rite, although always with reference to the church 'community (who are rarely actually present) through whom the rite is given authority. Most of the questionnaire respondents had few guests at the baptisms, mainly godparents and close family. Fewer than half of questionnaire respondents, and only one of the mothers to whom I talked, had their baby baptised during their church's main Sunday worship, and so in the presence of the usual church congregation: most baptisms happened at other times of day. However, the number of guests invited by the mothers I talked to was much larger (between thirty and one hundred and twenty): it was important to have family and friends gathered together.

Lisa described a christening she had attended in Ripon Cathedral which, although beautiful, had been spoiled by members of the public coming into the building during the service. She commented, 'I thought that's not what I would have wanted if it had been mine. No. It's all about family, and your family coming together. And it being quite intimate.'[416]

Abby Day is a sociologist of religion whose primary study sought to make explicit the meaning of 'Belief'. Her work, based on research in a Yorkshire town, is helpful in considering what 'belonging', in religious terms, might mean. She critiques Davie's idea of the unchurched who 'believe' (she thinks this remains undefined) but who don't 'belong';[417] instead she suggests that it is 'belonging' which is more important and contributes to

[416] Lis144.
[417] Abby Day uses Grave Davie's, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford :Blackwell, 1994) as her starting point.

performative believing.[418] She also sees this belonging as a key to identity, suggesting quite a different notion of identity than that proposed by Bauman:

> While my informants were aware that they had the freedom to choose many aspects of their lives, it was striking that in matters of wanting to belong to a particular people defined by culture, religion, birth or geography, they were sometimes intransigent and sought to claim a right to that particular identity as something that was ascribed.[419]

That is, identity was considered to indeed be a birthright, open to negotiation and which must be transmitted through the generations. Day suggests that it is the duty of the mother to transmit cultural values through the generations – 'Transmission failure is a serious threat to the continuity of the culture and therefore those who fail to transmit, being specifically mothers, were severely excoriated by many of my informants.'[420]

I would suggest that one of the means through which this transmission takes place is the christening. This act embodies or 'performs' the transmission of identity.[421] As I talked to Mick and Laura, they had described to me how important it was to gather family and friends together (they had one hundred and twenty guests) despite the expense and the anxiety in order for them to meet Lily-Jane. 'Everybody knows Laura's me partner and this is my child. That is my family. Yes.'[422]

Voas and Crockett, whose research uses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey, are clear that religious values and church attendance are transmitted between generations, '…our

[418] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World*, (Oxford: OUP, 2011), pp.6 – 10.
[419] Day, p.48.
[420] Day, p.49.
[421] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2003 [1977]), pp.44 – 45.
[422] Mi142.

view is that failure in religious socialisation has resulted in whole generations being less active and less believing than the ones who came before.'[423] Although, 'Young British adults are half as religious as their parents'[424] their only reference to the gender of the parent is to say that, 'there are signs in the data that maternal influence on religiosity is stronger for female than for male teenagers – the gender gap may be partly self-perpetuating.'[425]

None of the mothers I talked to thought that it was their role to pass on religion specifically because of their gender. However several did concede that it was their role because they did all the organising for their child. Despite this, the only woman I talked to who had not been the main organiser for the christening was Laura. Several of the women did say that it was they who had wanted the baptism more than their partner but they accounted for this through their own family 'tradition', with Daniela admitting, 'If it wasn't for me they might not have been baptised.'[426]

6.4 Belonging to the Church

While infant baptism is thought to have been practised in the early church, it was not until the Reformation that the first rites of infant baptism were composed. One of the purposes of these rites was to receive the child into 'the visible Church of Christ.'[427] That is, baptism marked the start of membership of the Church.

[423] D. Voas and A. Crockett, 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging', *Sociology* 39:1 (2005), 11-28, p.20.
[424] Voas and Crockett, p.22.
[425] Voas and Crockett, p.24.
[426] Da108.
[427] Bryan Spinks, 'Cranmer Baptism and Christian Nurture: or Toronto Revisited', *Studia Liturgica* 32, (2002), 98 – 110, p.104.

Some of Day's informants had declared themselves to be Christian in the census because they had been 'christened'. She observes that for them, being a Christian, 'only required being 'named' or attending Sunday school as children, or.... being part of what they described as Christian culture.'[428] The sense of belonging which this encapsulates 'relocates Christian identity as a public, social act'[429] and is reflected in the responses I received. So, although christening marks the beginning of belonging in the church, it is less of a spiritual belonging than a social one.

> Harriet, 14, said she would answer the census question with 'Christian. Don't know why. Because I was baptised. I'd just answer Christian without thinking'. Penny said, 'Because I was christened Church of England'. Being Christened, or baptised, is a social act signifying belonging to a family and, nominally, the church to which the family belongs…. The baptismal experience is not recalled as a religious experience, but a social one……..[430]

When asked what difference christening had made for their child, twenty five respondents replied that it had made them church members, part of God's family and one respondent said that her son would be able, therefore, to be married in church.[431] The questionnaires were completed by women for whom membership of the church was considered important. 'In later years he felt he belonged to the church, the family of God and the youth group within the church.'[432]

However, church membership was much less important for the women with whom I talked in the next phase of the research. Sandra said she had been told that, 'you can't get married and

[428] Day, p.72.
[429] Day, p.72.
[430] Abby Day, 'Propositions and Performativity: Relocating Belief to the Social', *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 11:1, (2010), 9-30, p.22.
[431] Baptism is not a requirement for marriage in the Church of England.
[432] Ebb26.

you can't get buried' without being baptised.[433] Sarah was confident about her own membership of the Church of England, 'to be honest it opens up a lot of doors for her as well, for schools.'[434] While this was key, Sarah did not mention the local church.

In her historical account of religious belief and popular culture, Sara Williams writes about the connection of a family with 'our church', especially with the associated understanding of church morality. Baptism was considered to be the key not only to church membership in this life, but also a guarantee of a place in heaven:

> The view was widely held that an association with the church in infancy was sufficient to entitle an individual to claim the various privileges of that community without fulfilling what the church itself saw as the obligations. The nominal membership of the church which was conferred through the baptismal ritual was believed to be sufficient to ensure that an individual would be 'all right' when it came to the final judgement, as his or her identification with the sacred community was ensured.'[435]

Sarah was the only mother who referred at all to the final judgement, in purgatory, although she claimed not to believe in it, but she did also express a sense of connecting with God and the church through baptism: 'Welcome to your church. This is my thanks. Giving you my child.'[436] But there were other mothers who seemed to be reassured by the identification with sacred community manifest in baptism. Tracey began our conversation by telling me that she had decided to have her children christened because it was her partner's tradition.[437] However, she went on to explain how she attended church as a child with her grandmother,

[433] San109.
[434] Sar2.
[435] Sara Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1999), p.101.
[436] Sar95.
[437] Tr11.

and about her still religious aunt and uncle. The christenings would re-connect with that world which she had known as a child:

> 'Its quite hard to explain really, but you get everybody together in the likes of the church. You are all together there and obviously loads of my family are into that and they want to sit and pray and its nice seeing that.'[438]

Those who attend church rarely, perhaps only for a christening, may be called an 'occasional congregation'. Davies developed this term from the corresponding term 'occasional offices'. The occasional congregation gather to, 'mark some seasonal or historical event or to mark a more unique occasion'.[439] Those who become part of an occasional congregation would still consider themselves to be church members: 'baptism may now, more than ever, indicate something of an inclination towards a religious affirmation'.[440] The importance of this here, is that while the regular or 'core' congregation may not agree, occasional congregations consider themselves as belonging to the church.[441] Being part of an occasional congregation (however infrequently) marks that belonging, and for the mother (or other) organising a christening provides an opportunity for the occasional congregation to come together and so, for their belonging to be affirmed.

Emile Durkheim, writing at the turn of the last century, argued that religion is social. Religion, he suggests, provides meaning for life and authority figures while reinforcing collective moral and social norms: 'Since it is in spiritual ways that social pressure exercises itself, it could not fail to give men the idea that outside themselves there exists one or several

[438] Tr153.
[439] Douglas Davies, 'Priests Parish and People: Reconceiving a Relationship' in Mathew Guest et al, *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.160.
[440] Davies, p.161.
[441] Davies, p.164, refers to the Rural Church Project which asks whether participants felt that, 'people take advantage of the church for their own convenience in marriage, baptism or funerals.' 74% answered in the affirmative.

powers, both moral and, at the same time, efficacious, upon which they depend.'[442] While the moral community he suggests as being key to society may be considered to be the church, I will go on to argue that it could also be the family.

6.5 Belonging to a Family

In the early stages of my research I spoke to a grandmother who proudly told me that all of her family – children and grandchildren – had been baptised, 'We don't believe in religion but we do believe in baptism.' In Day's terms (and perhaps also in Durkheim's) the beliefs about who we are, are confirmed through rituals of belonging.[443] For this woman, baptism revealed more about her family's identity than about her church membership.

This strong link between the family and the ritual of baptism has also been seen in other conversations and in my questionnaire responses. Out of sixty questionnaire responses, fifty-four said they invited family to the christening, of these, thirteen said family only, fifteen family and godparents, and twenty-five family and close (or special) friends. Most of these referred to baptisms which occurred over twenty years ago.[444] When asked what was special about the day, a third of respondents mentioned their family in some way, one such respondent commented:

> 'It was lovely to have family together and to welcome baby into family.'[445]

[442] Emile Durkheim, p.171.
[443] Day, *Believing in Belonging*, pp.16 – 17.
[444] Only three respondents described a baptism occurring within the last twenty years – all the others predate 1994.
[445] Hild1.

The very presence of the family, gathered together, is important. There is a joining of the infant to the family, their relationship reinforced as this new child is accommodated. The child is situated within the family, 'to situate the person as a social object is to bring him together with other objects so situated and, at the same time, to set him apart from still other objects. Identity is intrinsically associated with all the joinings and departures of life'.[446]

One of the questions asked what difference baptism made to the mother, the child and the family. Of the thirty-three who responded to the question about what difference it made for the family, nineteen of these suggested that there had been some sort of family obligation to baptism in the form of expectation or family tradition.

> 'On both my husband's and my side of the family all babies had been baptised, my siblings, Alan's siblings (it was the right thing to do).'[447]

So, for almost one third of respondents, the family connection in christening seems to have made it a rite of intensification which reinforces the family's identity. The expectation of this suggests the strength of the family obligation even among competing schemas. For all of the mothers I talked to, the presence of family was the most important element of the christening – some expressed genuine disappointment if any members of the family had not been able to attend. Jane, in particular, was keen to bring her family together for an occasion of celebration, 'an opportunity for the family to get together on happier terms.'[448] This connection was exemplified by Liz and Jane as they described how they anticipated having a sense of the presence of their deceased relatives through the christening service. The bonds

[446] Arnold M. Rose, *Human Behaviour and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach* (Abingon: Routledge, 1962), p.94.
[447] Aid1.
[448] Ja54.

of family were continuing through this ritual. 'Grandad died in March but I feel like he will be there on the day. When the vicar is holding the baby I feel like I will feel my granddad's presence the more, partially because he will have wanted to be there. It's like a connection.'[449]

The important presence of the family at the baptism reinforces the belonging together of that family (at least for another generation) through the life of this infant. [450] Day describes this 'natal' membership as an 'impermeable boundary as it is understood to be inherent, not acquired.'[451] It suggests that identity is ascribed.

In writing about kinship (some forty years ago) Schneider reports that one of the first principles of the American kinship system is a principle of blood links. He argues that it is this which has a first claim on relationships –blood as 'substance' gives rise to substantive relationships: it is American blood relatives whose relationship is more enduring. [452] Schneider further suggests that the sexual union on which the family is founded and for which those blood ties develop is also symbolically important in understanding the family and kinship systems:

> They symbolize diffuse, enduring solidarity.....They symbolise trust, but a special kind of trust which is not contingent and which does depend on reciprocity. They stand for the fact that birth survives death, and that solidarity **is** enduring.[453]

[449] Liz67.
[450] This point is also made by W.S.F. Pickering, 'The Persistence of Rites of Passage: Towards an Explanation', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 25:1 (1974), 63-78, p.76.
[451] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World*, (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p.55.
[452] David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* 2nd edn., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980 [1968]), p.90.
[453] Schneider, p.116.

Strathern, whose work on English kinship follows that of Schneider, further suggests that family relations are seen as 'embodying primordial ties.'[454] While she argues that kinship ties are less based on human reproduction (and therefore sexual union) she maintains that they represent inevitable relations of tradition and nostalgia.[455] I would suggest, then, that the christening of the child, and the gathering of the family is, then, itself part of (or contributes to) the symbolic importance of baptism as part of the kinship narrative of endurance. The new baby is the embodiment of that solidarity. As I talked to Julia, the only single mother in my research, she had emphasised the importance of gathering her family together for the christening. She told me that she was 'a bit gutted' to learn that several family members could not be there, but pleased that, 'they've met him now though.'[456]

6.6 The Performance of Family

Family may be defined by practice as much (or even more than) by kinship. That is, self-understanding is both observed and perpetuated through performance.[457] This allows for fluid relationships which transcend those of traditional kinship ties. Jane Finch argues that family identity is confirmed as it is displayed: 'Display is the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences, that certain of their actions do constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family relationships'.[458] Rituals, and the photographs which record them, are important means of family performance, publically displaying both family membership and unity.

[454] Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.11.
[455] Strathern, p.198.
[456] Ju31.
[457] This is discussed with particular reference to David Morgan, by Deborah Chambers, *A Sociology of Family Life*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012) pp.41-2.
[458] Jane Finch, 'Displaying Families', *Sociology*, 41, (2007), 65 -81, p.67.

Families develop a family discourse which, although sometimes restrictive, becomes part of the family identity through the enactment of shared rituals.[459] Jane Ribbens suggests that it is women who are responsible for creating and maintaining the family unit through welding individual members together and drawing clear boundaries around the family unit: 'It is the presence of children that is crucial to family symbolism'[460]. It is in christening that the presence of children is ritually and publicly acknowledged and thus the family and its perpetuation also marked. As children are the symbol of family, then the public ritual acknowledging the child also acknowledges the family. Christening becomes a shared rite within the family which is embedded into the family discourse.[461]

6.6a The Paradigmatic Scene

During the Christening services I observed, the parents were invited to gather on the chancel steps with the baby and the godparents as they made their promises. The gathering, carefully rehearsed by the clergy and families, consists of the mother holding the baby, father (sometimes) at her side with the traditionally three, but usually more, godparents around them. This is a key element in the performance of the ritual, creating a tableau which sets the scene, and brings the 'performers' on to public display. The scene described here resonates with the nativity scene: one which is familiar, and which most people can understand and, focussed on a new-born baby, one in which they can be – even unwittingly- caught up.

I would suggest that the nativity scene, is, in Rodney Needham's term, and in this context, a paradigmatic scene. That is, the scene itself is archetypal or exemplary although rooted in the

[459] This is revealed in the work of Robyn Fivush, 'Remembering and Reminiscing. How individual lives are constructed in Family Narrative', *Memory Studies*, 1:1, (2008), 49 – 58, p.55.
[460] Jane Ribbens, *Mothers and Their Children, A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing* (London: Sage, 1994), p.59.
[461] William M Walsh and Robert Keenan, 'Narrative Family Therapy', *The Family Journal*, 5:4 (1997), 332 – 336.

unconscious.[462] Douglas Davies has done most to develop Needham's work on this, developing Needham's ideas: 'A paradigmatic scene consists of a narrative picture of some event that becomes foundational for the core values of a tradition.[463]' That is, the 'verbal picturing' of the event enshrines the core beliefs of a group. At a christening the core beliefs of the group rest both on the perpetuation of the family and the extension of the family with the addition of godparents. It is this which is unconsciously being performed as the nativity scene, which might be considered an 'ideal type', is being recalled. So, in this scene, the family symbolically represents the holy family of the nativity thus emphasising the importance of the role of the family in this rite and evoking an emotional remembrance: 'paradigmatic scenes foster and intensify preferred emotions, helping to constitute the memorable relations of believers with their past.'[464] This is truly a performance of family as it connects to previous generations.

However, the focus of this scene is the baby Jesus who as a child born without the stain of sin, is a symbol not only of innocence but of hope for humanity. In this scene, then, the baby Jesus catalyses societal views of children as they bring hope for the future of the family. Just as the baby Jesus represents the core cultural values of the narrative of salvation so the child represents something of the core cultural values of the group – in this case, the family.

6.7 Godparents

One of the ways that the boundaries of family relationship can be publicly and ritually extended is through godparents. This might reflect the research referred to above which

[462] Rodney Needham, *Circumstantial Deliveries* (London: University of California Press, 1981), p.1.
[463] Douglas Davies, 'Memorable Relations and Paradigmatic Scenes', paper given at BASR, 2008, www.basr/diskus-old/diskus10/davies.htm [accessed 2/6/2016]
[464] Douglas Davies, 'Memorable Relations'.

suggests that families are 'performed'. Abby Day also observes that the boundaries of families have become flexible, and can include those with whom close trusting relationships have been formed, 'Kinship for N was not defined by biology or structure- it depended for him on the success of the adherent relationships in which he has faith and feels he belongs.'[465]

For seventeen of my questionnaire respondents, godparents were exclusively family. This reflects David Clarke's experience, that godparents were often siblings of the parents.[466] However, there were many others who chose close friends as godparents: fourteen respondents chose family and close friends. It may be that these families were being deliberately (and selectively) reconstructed through the addition of godparents.

All of the women with whom I talked had considered carefully how to choose godparents. Tracey had chosen only family because only family could be completely trustworthy. Liz had chosen her best friend with whom she has a 'special bond' whom she hoped would have a similar bond with her two children. Linda also had chosen friends, saying, 'it would be nice to have few more extra people to think that he is special too.'[467] So, godparents seem to be a means of extending the family and publicly acknowledging 'adherent relationships'.[468]

In his introduction to the role of godparents and kinship in Early Medieval Europe, Lynch observes, 'In many contemporary and past societies, the sponsorship of a child has social

[465] Day, *Believing in Belonging*, p.85.
[466] David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), **p.**125.
[467] Lin49.
[468] Day, p.168.

consequences, initiating a relationship of the sponsor with the child and with its parents that can be both intimate and enduring.'[469] In the eighth century the implication might have been that the relationship became that of co-parenting, 'The child's mother and father were thought to share their parenthood both with the baptiser and with the sponsor.' [470] While this is no longer the explicit role of the godparent, in focus group discussion one respondent said,

> 'My mum was so upset with me for not asking him [my brother]. I think my mum wanted completely family to be godparents whereas I think it's a fine balance. But my mum thinks it should be completely family.'

She added:

> 'And the other thing is that the godparents – if the parents get killed– they get the children, like a second parents role.'

Several of the mothers I talked to had also chosen godparents who they thought would make good substitute parents. Gemma told me that this was why she had chosen her sister and her husband, 'the reality is that if anything happened to me or Phil then she would live with her without a doubt.'[471] In fact they had carefully chosen the four godparents whom they would be comfortable caring for their daughter if 'anything were to happen.' However, Claire told me that she had chosen godparents to be 'guardian angels of our little boy to guide him if he needs help but never in my mind did I think these people if I die, these are the people who will look after my son.'[472]

[469] Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.4.
[470] Lynch, p.5.
[471] Ge44.
[472] Cl81.

The role remains an important way of maintaining or formalising social relationships. Alfani et al describe godparenthood as 'spiritual kinship'. In Italy the first choice of godfather was often made from among the extended family, it may continue to be a means of extending those relationships. They suggest that, 'if the family is (relatively) weak then godparenthood is more frequently used to ritually reinforce family ties.'[473] However, they observe that the very low birth rate in Italy over the past three decades may account for a decline in these kinship systems. Alfani et al note a decline in the number of baptisms of Roman Catholics in both Italy and France, although they argue that the number of baptisms is higher than usual church attendance would suggest in order that godparents be appointed. In France, godparents may also be appointed during 'municipal civil baptisms' (*parrainges repulicains*) which have increased in popularity since the 1980s, 'to answer to the demands of many French parents wanting to publicly give their children godparents without any involvement of the Church.'[474]

The appointment of godparents as a means of extending kinship systems is also true for some of the mothers I have talked with and especially for Julia, who told me that she had chosen to have the baby christened because, 'I just thought it was something nice and special 'cos his Dad isn't around so to me it was like you don't have that side of the family around but you still have all of these people around who care for you to protect you.'[475] This was also true in her choice of godparents whom she had carefully selected from among her wide friendship group, 'I want people to show him a good example and to know that they are going to be there for him and those were the people I thought would do that.'[476]

[473] Guido Alfani, Vincent Gourdon, and Agnese Vitali, 'Social Customs and Demographic Change: The Case of Godparenthood in Catholic Europe', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 51:3, (2012), 484-504, p.500.
[474] Alfani et al.,p.484.
[475] Ju16.
[476] Ju89.

6.8 Identity Depletion

Douglas Davies first coined the term 'Identity depletion', drawing on psychologists' concept of ego-depletion, but used to refer to a wider relationship of identity beyond the ego: referring to relationship, society and context.

> Identity Depletion would include life circumstances where a sense of meaningless and hopelessness begin to pervade a person's life or even the life of a community, and where otherness becomes malevolent and reciprocity constricted.[477]

Davies suggests that ritual action can offer a means of transformation to those whose identities, through a series of losses, have been depleted. I would suggest that, for those people, the rites of baptism take on increased importance as they declare an infant's identity and belonging even when the family unit is not functional. In her questionnaire response, Vera wrote in detail about her own deprived upbringing and rejection by society and her church. What struck me most of all in her responses, though, was that she had only two invited guests at the christening and she had no recollection of the gifts the child received. This seems to give credence to Bauman's words about a loss of identity:

> The effacement of individuality, of 'face' – that object of ethical duty and moral care. You are cast outside the social space in which identities are sought, chosen, constructed, evaluated, confirmed or refuted.'[478]

[477] Davies, *Emotion*, p.69.
[478] Bauman, *Identity*, p.39.

This was Vera's response to the question, asking why, if she didn't attend church regularly at the time of the baptism, she started attending later:

> Our first child, our son, died of S.I.D. at the age of nineteen weeks. I was brought up in N, completely outside the influence of the church. Too poverty stricken as a family to believe the church – even in N, as only those who were deemed by us to be more worthy (and who possessed a change of clothes) attended church. At the age of eight I tried to attend three churches: St B's C of E, St K's RC and a small evangelical church and was turned away by all three. Being a scruffy little N urchin, I was treated with great suspicion, so I know now, then I felt rejected and very very upset. This had a profound effect on me and endorsed the fact that, coming from where I did, even to God I was worthless. I had nothing more to do with the church until I was thirty six years old (my son died when I was twenty four). This does not mean I did not have an awareness of things spiritual or spiritual experiences. When our daughter was born nine and a half months after our son died, and at the age of nine months, we had her baptised in the Roman Catholic church (my husband is R C). I really wanted her baptised as I did not want her growing up to believe she was worthless too. Even during the baptism, I was afraid as I still did not believe God wanted me anywhere near his church. I was there purely to offer my child's spirit to him.

The godparents Vera had chosen were her husband's brother and a work colleague who were practising Roman Catholics, although to the question, 'Would you choose differently now', Vera replied:

> Yes, I thought they had to be church attenders and preferably Roman Catholic. Now I would choose our closest friends.

This mother had been failed by her own family and local churches leading to a continuing and deep antagonism towards the poor community where she grew up.[479] She had felt, even

[479] She also attached a poem she had written about her experiences of growing up and of 'escape' which suggested a continued resentment.

as an adult, sufficiently devitalised to be rendered unable to acknowledge a wider network or publicly acknowledge other relationships through the choice of godparents.

Day reports that, 'just as belonging seems to fuel belief, so, too, does not belonging.'[480] Day refers to this as a way of 'covering over the cracks' in belonging and understanding through a belief in God. Although Day suggests that this belief is usually temporary, in Vera's case it had been long-lasting as she said she was a member of the church she now attends. It seems, though, that Vera's sense of not belonging which she had experienced throughout her life and had led to her own sense of identity depletion had been instrumental in her desire to have her baby christened in order to give her the sense of belonging which she had never felt.

However, this account would suggest that there was a desire for belonging. Firstly this was about belonging to God: 'I wanted God to love her and protect her in a way I never felt as a child', 'I was there purely to offer my child's spirit to him.' And also it was about belonging to a family and so connecting to a network of relationships, 'It meant she had a family larger than our little family.'

6.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have referred to sociological and anthropological literature, and to my research data in order to show how important christening is for the identity not just of the child being baptised but also for her family. This, I suggest, is a way of ascribing identity and being brought into contact with a sacred (the church) and moral (the family) community. However, the community to which there is a greater sense of commitment is the family. As a

[480] Day, *Belonging*, 196.

family ritual, christening becomes part of a shared discourse with the child herself being a key symbol of the perpetuation of the family. The definition of family in this context need not be constrained by kinship ties as the choosing of godparents allows family units to be extended, and, for some, church membership suggests joining a different kind of family. In my next chapter, I shall go on to show how that family connection is symbolised in the clothes worn for the baptism which become part of a narrative of belonging and continuity.

Chapter Seven: Material Identity: The Christening Gown

In the previous chapter I argued that for the mothers in this research, christening was a means of ascribing the identity of the child and intensifying the identity of the adult at the same time as bringing the child into the family through the creation of narrative. The important community with which the child connects in this ritual is the family rather than the church, even though the words of the liturgy would suggest otherwise.

In this chapter, I shall continue to explore the importance of family through the symbol of the christening gown. I will argue here that the christening gown might be considered sacred using the term as defined by Durkheim, 'Sacred things are simply collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects.'[481] I shall also suggest that as a material object the gown provides a thread – literal or metaphorical – which connects the generations of a family together, 'Through objects we keep alive the collective memory of societies and families which would otherwise be forgotten.'[482]

In the initial phase of my research, I observed that the christening robe may demonstrate the different meanings baptism has for its participants, demonstrating the symbolic dissonance experienced by those participants. This was confirmed in the questionnaires and in the conversations. While the early roots of the white baptismal robe are well documented and are theologically meaningful for at least the clergy,[483] they appear to have limited application to the women's understanding of the robe. As I begin to uncover some of its various levels of

[481] Emile Durkheim, 'The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions', in *Emile Durkheim*, ed. by R. Bellah (Chicago: Chicago University Press. 1973), p.159.
[482] Stephen H. Riggins *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Social Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), p.2.
[483] See especially, Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation, Their Evolution and Interpretation* (The Liturgical Press: Minnesota, 1999), p.260; Bryan D Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp.164 – 200; Simon Jones and Philip Tovey, 'Initiation Services', in *Companion to Common Worship vol 1* ed. by Paul Bradshaw (London: Alcuin/SPCK, 2001).

meaning I shall argue that the robe itself, in Turner's categories, is multi-vocal – that is, it 'possesses many significations simultaneously.'[484]

7.1 The Christening Gown in the early Church

In the early Church, the baptismal robe, a clean white garment, was used for the neophyte who would have been either naked or wearing old clothes for the baptism, to be clothed in after the baptism itself. The central text for this practice was Galatians 3:27: 'for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.'[485]

Chrysostom placed importance on the white baptismal robe as reflecting the purity and joy which Cyril had referred to; he perceived the stripping of the old clothes as the stripping away of sin and the nakedness of the candidates at baptism suggests the primaeval innocence of Adam and Eve, 'since they have put on Christ himself, wherever they go they are like Angels on Earth, rivalling the brilliance of the rays of the sun.'[486] So, the new white garment indicates a life of purity and reflects the eschatological anticipation of the coming of Christ: 'it may well be that the baptismal robe was donned by the neophytes immediately following their emergence from the waters of baptism.'[487]

It is recorded that this practice was widespread and still usual at the time of Augustine who referred to the neophytes as, 'white-robed enlightened ones': [488]

[484] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine Publishing Co, 1969), p.41.
[485] Galatians 3:27.
[486] Burnish, p.47.
[487] Burnish, p.21.
[488] William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), p.315.

> After these rites the neophytes would don white robes made, in all probability of white linen. These linen robes were an ancient symbol of ritual purity and would have contrasted with the goat skin sackcloth which the newly baptised had, as *competentes*, trodden underfoot. For the next eight days they wore their baptismal robes to signal their commitment to a stainless life.[489]

Although the practice of putting on a white garment as part of the post-baptismal rite continued at least until the 1549 edition of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), by 1662 the practice had been abandoned.[490] However, the baptism rite published in Common Worship refers back to this early practice, offering an option for the newly baptised to be clothed with a white robe, the notes refer to this as a practicality particularly where 'dipping is the mode of baptism.'[491]

7.2 The Christening Gown as Symbol

Religious symbols give meaning to ordinary experience.[492] Victor Turner argues that symbols hold both a multiplicity of meanings and a multiplicity of relationships between meanings.[493] That is, symbols are ambiguous and can be understood as being on opposite semantic poles. At one pole are clustered significata that refer to 'principles of social organisation, to kinds of corporate grouping, and to the norms and values inherent in structural relationships. At the other end the significata are usually natural and the physiological phenomena and processes'.[494] Turner explains this as:

[489] Harmless, p.312.
[490] Maxwell E Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation, Their Evolution and Interpretation* (The Liturgical Press: Minnesota, 1999), p.260.
[491] Simon Jones and Philip Tovey, 'Initiation Services', in Paul Bradshaw, (ed), *Companion to Common Worship vol 1,* (London: Alcuin/SPCK, 2001), p.171.
[492] Maurice Bloch, *Essays on Cultural Transmission* (Oxford : Berg, 2005), p.21.
[493] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1970), p.29.
[494] Turner, *Forest*, p.28.

> A single symbol, in fact, represents many things at the same time: it is multi-vocal, not universal. Its referents are not all of the same logical order but drawn from many differing domains of social experience and ethical evaluation. Finally its referents tend to cluster around opposite semantic poles. At one pole the references are to social and moral facts. At the other, to physiological facts.[495]

These poles are referred to as the 'ideological' pole and the 'sensory' pole. The description of the baptismal garment as understood by the church fathers could be placed mainly at the ideological pole. It certainly represents the values which the clergy and liturgists place upon the use of special clothing in baptism and in so doing, 'refers to the ideology, doctrine and beliefs of the group'.[496] The christening robe is also material and, however interpreted theologically, remains material and so also situated at the sensory pole; thus the robe as symbol has meaning at both poles.

The mothers have a more embodied understanding of the importance of the robe as relating to its materiality, to family and to identity, which is, then, situated at the sensory pole. An exploration of the sensory pole in this way opens up a way of understanding meanings which enhance traditional, ideological understandings. Turner's work would suggest that a symbol can only be fully understood when the meanings clustered at either pole are considered as part of a whole.

This idea is also expressed by Rappaport:

[495] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p.52/3.
[496] Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p.174.

> A ritual sign does not derive its meanings from each of its significant parts separately so much as it derives its meaning from their union. This is to say but what is noise in ordinary language is meaning in liturgy.[497]

So, when exploring the ritual significance of the christening robe, it is important to move beyond its theological and liturgical meaning, in order to explore its other 'noises'. That is, as Rappaport suggests in his development of Turner's term 'multivocalic', significata are, '*signified simultaneously*, whenever the canonical sign is represented.'[498]

7.3 The Meaning of the Christening Gown for Mothers

One elderly mother told me with some amusement that her eldest son Michael, had been baptised wearing a winceyette nightdress. This alerted me to the importance of the christening robe for the mothers I have been engaging with. It was amusing not just because he should be wearing something so ordinary and unsophisticated as a winceyette nightdress, but indeed that he (a boy) should be wearing a dress at all.

Many of the women I talked to in focus groups were unable to remember much about what happened during the liturgical actions of the service, but all were able to tell me in detail what their child wore: most still have the dress wrapped in some sort of keepsake box, or it had been passed on to another member of the family.

> 'I have got a box for special things. They would be kept in the hope that the grandchildren would use it.'

[497] Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.256
[498] Rappaport, p.254.

> 'I knit a little dress – it was used for all 3 of them and used for my grand daughter.'

The christening robe is an expected form of dress for a christening, not only theologically (the point at which this chapter started) but also socially: its meaning is related to its uniformity.[499] Linda B. Arthur writing about the cultural importance of clothing argues that, 'dress functions as an effective means of non-verbal communication during social interaction; it influences the establishment and projection of identity.'[500] That is, the physical body takes on the normative values of the social body, and this is most apparent in dress.[501] The wearing of the christening dress suggests an embodiment of the normative values of the social body. To wear something other (and parents may choose to dress their child in 'everyday' clothes) suggests separation from the group and perhaps even, to some extent disassociation from the rite itself.

Although none of the mothers with whom I talked in later phases of the research used a robe which had been passed down through the generations, their child's attire continued to be of importance to them. Some expressed a regret that either there did not seem to be a family gown or that it would not fit their child (most family gowns were designed for babies just a few weeks old). Others had been offered a gown but rejected it (although some of these were using a shawl instead). This rejection was most dismissive by Julie, 'I didn't want to put him in a dress. It's like baby's first drag act.'[502] Likewise, Sandra described recently attending the baptism of her mother's new baby who was wearing the family robe, 'It's like five

[499] Linda B Arthur, *Religion Dress and the Body*, p.3.
[500] Linda B Arthur, 'Dress and the Social Control of the Body', in *Religion, Dress, and the Body*, ed. by Linda B Arthur (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p.3.
[501] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
[502] Ju59.

hundred years old, but I just thought they looked really tatty and like mouldy dresses so I don't like them at all.'[503]

Nevertheless, there seemed to be a desire for connection through the clothes, although all the five boys in the research wore little suits. As Claire said, 'I didn't want him to look like a jester.'[504] Nevertheless, the baby girls wore robes which copied the traditional robe apart from Sandra's daughter, aged 2, who would be wearing a 'big pretty princess dress.'[505] Gemma and Laura had each bought two dresses for their daughters, one which was long and mimicked a traditional gown, the other a party dress.

Although for practical or aesthetic reasons these parents did not choose ancient family gowns, they all said that they would keep these christening clothes in a special place either to be used for other children, grand-children or just to create good memories. Emily's mam had crocheted the dress which her daughter wore, 'I wanted it to be an heirloom, I want it to be kept for ever.'[506]

7.4 The Christening Gown and the Wedding Dress

In the initial phase of the research, some of the women talked about the christening dress being made out of a wedding dress.

[503] Sa34.
[504] Cl23.
[505] Sa32.
[506] Em58.

> ‘Sometimes people have used the wedding dress material for the christening robe. My sister-in-law used my grandma's wedding dress material for the christening robe.’

In the questionnaire responses, one woman said the dress had been made using material from her wedding dress.[507] Another responded that her baby had worn her ‘wedding veil.’[508]

Two of the mothers I talked to who had made this link were Lisa and Julia. Lisa was not married (she explained the baby had been a bit of a surprise) but she had her mother’s wedding dress, she had considered cutting it down to make a christening dress, but had eventually decided to save it in case she wanted to use it herself. Julia, the only single mother I talked to said:

> ‘It’s something special to keep. It’s like keeping your wedding dress isn’t it?’[509]

This suggests a ritual link between the wedding and the christening. Jon Davies suggests that marriage was defined until the 1950’s as being not only the answer to lust but overwhelmingly, ‘as an institution providing the best way to bring up children’[510]. ‘Those who ‘had to’ have sex had to do so within the context or ‘confines’ of marriage, and to do so in order to have children.’[511] If the purpose of marriage is, as Davies suggests, procreation, then its fulfilment is ritually acknowledged in the christening. The birth of the child

[507] Aid11.
[508] Aid13.
[509] Ju56.
[510] Jon Davies, ‘A Preferential Option for the Family’, in Stephen Barton, (ed), *The Family in Theological Perspective*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 219-236, p.222.
[511] Jon Davies, p.223.

(described by Augustine as one of the 'goods' of marriage[512]) marks not only the 'success' of the marriage, but also perhaps it is a sign of the marriage being blessed by God: 'procreation and reproduction are an essential aspect of participating in God's covenant with humanity'[513].

The wedding dress across cultures often represents 'purity' and maintains a link with 'tradition'. Foster and Johnson suggest that the importance of the wedding dress is that it, 'forms a complex set of interlocking relationships that hold a society together.'[514] For Sarah Farrimond, it is the distinctiveness of the dress which is its most remarkable feature:

> The persistent popularity of the white wedding dress lies in its distinctiveness. The rarity and impracticality of a long white dress ensured its visibility and consolidated its association with weddings.[515]

It could be argued that the long white christening robe is equally distinctive, impractical and associated only with christenings. So, it is like the wedding dress in appearance, in impracticality (it is much easier to dress the baby in a romper suit), but also in purpose. A bride wants a wedding dress in order to do the right thing, to fit in with expectations, to maintain tradition. The mothers who had bought new but long and impractical christening robes were also maintaining tradition, fitting in with expectations and doing the right thing. However, all the mothers, even those opting for more practical or more exuberant styles of christening attire still opted to dress their child in white.

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[512] Augustine, 'On Marriage and Concupiscence', http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-marr.asp, [accessed 25/5/12].
[513] Natalie K. Watson, 'Expecting or On Being Open to Children' in *Children of God: Towards a Theology of Childhood*, ed. by Angela Shier-Jones (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 1-20, p.4.
[514] Helen Bradley Foster and Donald Clay Johnson, eds., *Wedding Dress Across Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p.1.
[515] Sarah Farrimond, *Ritual and Narrative in the Contemporary Anglican Wedding* (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2009): http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/78/219 [accessed 23/6/2013].

For Sharon, whom I met at the start of the research, the christening robe seems to have replaced the wedding dress in terms of extravagance and perhaps also of ritual significance. She spent two weeks' wages on the dress which she described:

> 'The whole thing was bought in cos nobody'd passed down anything for christening in the family. So my robe was the robe and it'd be passed around the family. It was around fifteen pounds – that was a huge amount of money.'

When I asked her if she wondered whether this extravagant dress might have offered some sort of compensation for the wedding dress she had missed out on she said:

> 'I hadn't had the big cherbang with the wedding or anything cos I was single and you wanted to have an occasion where you could remember and have the photos and have the family and have all the traditional things and yes that's probably a big part of it.'

7.5 The Gown as Sacred

After the baptism, the clothes the baby had worn (not just the dress, sometimes the shawl as well) are treated as something special, wrapped in tissue paper, set apart from the everyday only to be used again for the baptism of another member of the family.

> 'I was going to make one out of my wedding dress and a neighbour of my mother's insisted that I have hers and I thought I can't disappoint the lady, so had this lacy dress on and a little bonnet and beautiful coat thing that someone knitted him. And I've still got it – it was the only time he wore it.'

> 'O she had a beautiful white dress. With a lovely fur shrug with a hood. No hat. She was going to wear my christening dress but when it was

> unwrapped it hadn't been kept well enough. I would've loved to have had her christened in the dress that I was christened in. I've kept her outfit. And if we have another girl she'll wear it. I'll pass it on for her. If I had a boy I would like a traditional christening gown.'

In his definition of religion, Durkheim defines sacred things as 'things set apart and forbidden.'[516] It is as if through the careful setting apart the mother does acknowledge the ritual sanctification of the dress. One of the questionnaire respondents, whose son was baptised in 1953 wearing his father's dress, had it kept safely, 'wrapped in tissue in a drawer. I still have it as my other children and grandchildren were christened in it.'[517] This highlights the importance of paying attention to the sacred qualities of material things and the sacred symbols they embody, rather than just the sacred qualities of behaviours and beliefs.[518]

Colin and Guildman argue that the meanings of declarative acts are limited by convention: valid only in the context where their validity is understood. As they make their argument they are suggesting that in a similar way, accepted understanding of baptism suggests that it is only a child who is baptised and not her dress.

> For when the child is brought to the font so too, is its christening attire, which also comes in for a sprinkling of water from the font. Only the background understandings of the participants make it the case that the clothes are not part of what gets baptised.[519]

[516] Emile Durkheim, 'a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, - beliefs and practices which unite [into] one single moral community, all those who adhere to them. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* p.62.
[517] Hild2.
[518] This is discussed by Linda Arthur, p.31.
[519] Finn Collin and Finn Guildman, *Meaning , Use and Truth, Introducing the Philosophy of Language* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.59.

However, I think that what they say can be disputed: the sprinkling in which the dress (albeit accidentally) participates, does mean that it *is* part of what gets baptised and as such the dress, through its participation in the rite, is also sanctified. Its ritual closeness to the baptised infant has given even the dress sacramental importance, in fact the dress may be considered in itself the locus of the ritual for the mothers: something sacred. That is, in Rappaport's terms, its sanctification occurs through its being the product of symbol and ritual.[520]

Rappaport describes the key elements of the meaning making of ritual as Ultimate Sacred Postulates (USPs), arguing that they, 'sanctify, that is, certify, the entire system of understandings in accordance with which people conduct their lives.'[521] If we can acknowledge that the christening robe is indeed sacred, we then need to explore that Ultimate Sacred Postulate which underpins the notion of sacred. For theologians the USP of baptism is the salvation of the child. I would suggest that for the mothers it is family.

7.6 The Gown as a Symbol of Family

A quarter of the questionnaire respondents recounted that their baby had worn a family robe which had been passed on to them. This suggests a desire to connect the generations of a family – materially and experientially marking their relationships across generations and revealing a 'belonging' even to those deceased relatives whom they will never meet. As well as in the robe, this may also be reflected in the desire to return to the 'family' church for christenings with the connection being made manifest in the building or font. In Hagström's

[520] Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.256.
[521] Rappaport, p.265.

words, ‘The robe has a history and by wearing it the child becomes part of that history and the family.’[522]

Margaret told me about her daughter who had been hurt in an accident, burning her hands the day before the christening. This changed the plan for the dress although she was still able to wear a dress which belonged to the family:

> ‘My daughter, because of her hands, was not able to wear my dad's baptism robe from the early 1900. It is one of those flowing lacy jobs. But Fred wore it, my son. She wore something that I was christened in which was a long silky thing but it was special, and belonged to the family.’

Jane, whom I also met during the initial phase, was a young woman who is a committed Christian and had made a deliberate choice to have her baby baptised, said this:

> ‘All of mine have worn have worn the same dress, the one we bought for Lizzy (the eldest) we did have one passed down from Matthew's side but the neck was too tight. I would have quite liked something traditional through the family.’

The gown embodies a sense of perpetuation and continuation. Weiner suggests that 'cloth’ creates a continuous bond between one generation and the next,[523] and Schneider and Weiner writing about the anthropology of cloth, remark, ‘Participants in life-cycle celebrations in general and rituals of death in particular, frequently make of cloth a continuous thread, a

[522] Charlotte Hagström, ‘To Create a Sense of Belonging, Christening Gifts as Materialisation of Feelings’, in *The Ritual year and Ritual Diversity: Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the SIEF working group on The Ritual Year*, Institute for Language and Folklore, Gothenburg, 2006, 142–147.
[523] Annette B. Weiner, ‘Why Cloth? Wealth , Gender and Power in Oceania’ in *Cloth and Human Experience* ed. by Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington : Smithsonian Books, 1989), 37-61, p.45.

binding tie between two kinship groups, or three or more generations.[524] For some, this material thread is found in the christening robe itself. This thread is not just about the materiality of the gown, although in Schneider's and Weiner's terms, it can 'evoke ideas of connectedness or tying'[525] It is about a connection between generations which is expressed in a number of ways.

It may be that the mother herself is the symbol which ties the generations. Writing about the sociology of mothering, Martha McMahon suggests that it is mothers who symbolise connectedness.[526] It is the mother who is ultimately in control of blood kinship and the biological perpetuation of family.[527] We have already seen how the mother is held responsible for transmission of cultural behaviour – we can see this being extended through the christening into a responsibility for familial membership - connecting previous generations with the present so maintaining relationships even with the deceased while connecting the new generation with those still living. This connectedness can be manifest in the family christening robe, but can also be seen in the choice of church or font as being the 'family ' church, or perhaps even in the baptism itself which is seen as a family ritual as much as one belonging to the church.

This commitment to the continuation of the family and the importance of the material in embodying this is also reflected in Csikszentmihalyi's work on the meaning of things for the O family:

[524] Annettee B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, 'Introduction' in *Cloth and Human Experience*, 1-25, p.3.
[525] Weiner and Schneider, p.2.
[526] Martha McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women's Lives* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1995), p.127.
[527] David M. Schneider suggests that the mother controls blood kinship: *American Kinship: A Cultural Account (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980 [1968])*, p.65.

> The O family as a whole devotes its attention to the goal of cultivating family continuity. Things tend to acquire meaning because they are signposts of family history, which help family members re-experience crucial events and relationships they share. In doing this the artifacts also preserve, vitalise and transmit to those who will come after, the goal of family and ethnic continuity that is an essential aspect of the identities of these people.[528]

So, it is acknowledging the child as a new member of that family at the same time as reinforcing their family bonds and, through this rite, linking them with a ritual in which their family has participated for several generations. As the child, in baptism, is incorporated into the family, so the members of the family attending are reincorporated into that family and their bonds are reinforced. The christening robe which has been worn by several members of that family embodies and perpetuates those bonds.

7.7 The Gown as a Symbol of Identity

So the christening robe is not just about family identity but about an identity which is more individual. The child, in becoming adult, may continue to know herself as her relationship to the gown remains stable: while the individual may change, the gown does not. Hannah Arendt writes that, 'men [sic], their ever-changing nature not withstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and same table.'[529] I would suggest that relationship to the same robe also suggests a retrieval of identity.

[528] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Haton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), p.222.
[529] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p.137.

Perhaps the response to the robe is partly nostalgic but it is the thing mothers can hold on to (that is, make real or permanent) – their child will become adult and eventually leave: (the mother of Michael who had worn the wincyette nightdress had not seen him for twenty years). The dress remains constant. To some extent it may come to symbolise the child itself.

> The irrefutable realness of the physical things (even of fakes) is sentimentally apprehended. Things are sentimentally apprehended in the same ways that living children are, but the dead children [or grown up children]…no longer can be. They can be touched, held, caressed, poked, and gazed upon….like children, they can also be cleaned, protected and displayed for the admiration of others.[530]

7.8 Conclusion

In uncovering meaning, it is especially important to be attentive to all of those who participate in ritual, and especially those who belong to 'muted' groups in order that something of the complexity of symbols might be explored. However, symbols are, in their nature, ambiguous and may be multivocal. This has led to some dissonance in the understandings of baptism between 'The Church' and those who are participants in the ritual.

The theological meaning of the christening robe as an indicator of purity is less important to the mothers than its value as an indicator of identity which links it to the family and its rituals.

The christening robe provides a focus which is important for both clergy and the mothers participating in baptism yet means something different to each. The christening robe

[530] Linda Layne, *Motherhood Lost: The Cultural Construction of Miscarriage and Stillbirth in America* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.106.

embodies the meaning of baptism for mothers in a way that might not have been anticipated through the reading of liturgical theology, and through its very materiality, in a way which helps to overcome the constraints of verbal description. It is the expected 'costume' of christening and so integral to its performance.

In considering the meaning making of mothers in christening, the robe may, as I have argued, be considered sacred, and thus points toward the USP of the ritual which for the mothers is family. I have also argued that it is the mother who is responsible for the perpetuation of the family. In the following chapter, I shall discuss how this may reflect the ways in which through the christening of her child the mother might be considered to be fulfilling her societal and familial obligations.

Chapter Eight: Being Respectable and the Performance of Motherhood

Baptism is key in the ascribing of identity to the child and in the creating of family narrative as family is 'performed'. This 'performance' is also important for the new mother as she negotiates her role. In this chapter, I shall explore some aspects of this performance with particular reference to theories of 'capital'; to sociological work on respectability; and to the expectations of 'motherhood'. I shall argue that christening is an event which retains currency in an ongoing way throughout the life of the mother and child rather than just a 'one-off'.

As Sarah commented that having her child christened 'opens up a lot of doors for her as well' particularly in the context of schools, this expresses an awareness of capital gain. Sandra also referred to baptism as a way of opening up access to traditional church rituals, 'I know Lee wants it 'cos of things like so they can get married in the church we were married in.'[531]

Most of the parishes which participated in the research were in traditionally working-class areas. Although many of the women had 'done well' in material or educational terms, with a corresponding gain in social and cultural capital,[532] they still seek respectability and symbolic capital for themselves and their child through christening. Although it might have been anticipated that the more respectable the mothers seemed to be, the less they would emphasise the baptism: this is not the case. I will argue that, through christening, all of the women in my study are seeking symbolic capital and, therefore, respectability. I shall be

[531] San108.
[532] In this chapter I shall go on to refer to the work of Bourdieu. Particularly helpful here is, Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital' in J. Richardson(ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 241-258, p.249.

referring to Bourdieu to give this a framework[533] as I suggest that the christening of their child creates capital for both the mother and child, and enables the performance of 'good' motherhood.

8.1 Respectability

Many of the participants expressed a desire to 'do the right thing'. This desire for either themselves or their baby (or both) to be acceptable to and accepted by society reflects that observed by Bev Skeggs in her research among working class women and which she refers to as 'respectability'.[534] Skeggs brought to the forefront issues of class which she argued had become a neglected aspect of sociological theory especially in relation to women. She suggests that a key motivator for the working class women in her research was their desire to be respectable: this would define their femininity and their acceptability. Skeggs describes respectability in terms of the women's lives rather than defining it. It is valuable to use part of that description here:

> Respectability is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it. Respectability would not be something to desire to prove and to achieve if it had not been seen to be the property of 'others', those who were valued and legitimated.....it is rarely recognised as an issue by those who are positioned within it, who are normalised by it, who do not have to prove it.[535]

Respectability was also considered important in the ordering of community and church by Jenkins who contrasts the values of reputation, restraint and respectability with the contrary

[533] Bourdieu's theories of capital and habitus are increasingly used by Practical Theologians to provide a theoretical framework. Recently and notably by Christian Scharen, (ed.) *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015).
[534] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, (London: Sage, 1997), 1.
[535] Skeggs, 1.

values of fecklessness, gossip and violence.[536] Respectability, according to Jenkins, is neither imposed upon people nor related to ambition, but, rather, relies upon a desire for a certain status which is expressed through participation in the local community: 'social mutuality'.[537] Although Jenkins' case study examples are men, he concludes that it is women who have a central place in structuring local society which is especially obvious in chapels or churches whose members see themselves as a closed group of respectable people.[538] This is reflected in my research data, as it is mothers who are primarily seeking the respectability conferred at the christening of the child, and, at the same time, the women of the local church who complain that such gatherings are 'disrespectful' and, by implication, lacking in respectability. This closed group of respectable people (mainly women) may be antagonistic to the behaviour of christening parties (despite their own desire for respectability) often considering their behaviour not just inappropriate but also offensive.

8.2 Doing the Right Thing

The issue of respectability seems to be threaded throughout my research, seen not only through the now elderly stalwarts of the church who consider these young women to be not quite respectable but also as all the mothers described their desire to do the right thing. The tradition which I first encountered in my focus groups of the grandmother making (or at least assisting) the christening 'tea' has continued to the present. As Sarah said, 'It'll be all women'. These women continue to come together to ensure that costs are not prohibitive but that they do the 'right thing' in accordance with tradition and to demonstrate their capabilities. I shall go on to focus on just four of the women with whom I had conversations.

[536] Tim Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* (New York, Oxford: Berhahn Books, 1999), p.161.
[537] Jenkins, p.172.
[538] Jenkins, p.180.

Daniela had the most social status of any of the women I interviewed: she had been brought up in a church family, her grandfather and parents holding various positions of authority; she was married to an accountant, meaning she had been able to choose not to work at the time of our interview; she herself was a GP. This would all suggest that she could already be considered as respectable, and indeed, it was apparent in our conversation that she was aware of her own respectability especially in her understanding of this rite as affirming her familial church connections. Daniela had her children christened at the age of four months which was unusually young among the women I interviewed (although the questionnaire responses suggest this was more usual twenty years ago). When I asked Daniela why she wanted her children to be christened so young, she said, 'I just thought it was the done thing. I didn't really know, I just thought get on with it.'[539]

It is this concept of the done thing which I think indicates the desire for respectability in its obedience to perceived conventions and therefore social obligations. Daniela also had a low-key party afterwards, although she put that down to a change in family circumstances: it might have also been embedded in her confidence that she already had access to the social and cultural capital which a big party might have been perceived as indicating, 'We just booked the church hall. Tea, coffee, bit of cake.'[540]

The story Claire told me is similar in terms of capital in that she is a qualified dental nurse, her partner a dentist and, like Daniela, was renting a house while they looked for their 'dream house'. In offering a reason for choosing christening in addition to saying that both she and her partner had been christened:

[539] Da64.
[540] Da97.

> ‘I want him to learn and to be a nice person and live by the rules of God. If he wasn’t christened, then I think that I haven’t done my bit to try and shape him into a nice person ....’[541]

That is, by having him christened, Claire is being assured that he is offered the right morality to live by. This repeated idea of being a ‘nice person’ suggests respectability. Claire had a similar attitude to the party as Daniela, that is, she was keen to suggest that it would be low-key, so lacking in extravagance (and perhaps also vulgarity). It revealed, rather than her church connections, her family connections thus emphasising a whole family attitude to celebration.

> ‘I wouldn’t say it was a party, more of a gathering I would say and for all the kids to play together.’[542]

Claire was not yet married but, while hoping to marry in the same church, was keen to keep the wedding and the christening distinct, ‘You keep them separate, our time will come’.[543] So, although her sense of propriety had no concern about her not being married, she was concerned about the public nature of her baby being christened as an infant. She thought that the christening should properly take place when the child was quite young: ‘And family tradition says babies get christened when they are younger.’[544] This reflects Claire’s desire to honour tradition without making any mistakes.

[541] Cl61.
[542] Cl45.
[543] Cl89.
[544] Cl19.

Emily talked about her upbringing in the west end of Newcastle, and the contrast between that and her current 'comfortable' life. She had been a policewoman so while she had a respectable job, she had not been highly educated. As she talked about her house and possessions seemed to lose confidence in herself, suggesting that she didn't always have the 'right' taste.

> 'This house is important to me, but not particularly the contents, but its got something in that we've bought that mean something. There are presents around – my mam bought these ornaments. They're not a fashionable thing. But things like that mean a lot 'cos me mam bought them for me.'[545]

This seems to reflect Skeggs' findings – she observes that even those who have gained in various forms of capital still remain insecure in themselves and concerned to be respectable – or, more importantly, perceived as being respectable:

> They care about how they are seen in the eyes of the other. They feel they have to prove themselves through every object, every aesthetic display, every appearance.[546]

Emily had married Simon the previous year in the same church as the christening was to take place: 'I wanted a proper church wedding and I hoped it would be in the village where I lived. So it was lovely you know.'[547] This desire to be 'proper' seems to anticipate respectability. Emily also told me that Simon's grandmother had refused to display a photograph of her and Simon on holiday before they were married but had been willing to display her photograph once they were married – this indicates a legitimising of the

[545] Em113.
[546] Skeggs, *Formations*, p.90.
[547] Em9.

relationship and was considered important to Emily. The display of the photograph suggests a gaining of respectability.

> 'But when we got married there was the wedding photograph and baby photograph and it's as if I wasn't important to her till we got married.'[548]

After the christening service, the hundred guests were invited to a 'party', held in the local village pub. Emily wanted this event to be quite public: the birth of her child marked the fulfilment of their marriage, she had deliberately chosen for this to be on the second anniversary of her wedding and in the same church (with the same vicar). I think that this is a public marker of both her femininity and heterosexuality which Skeggs would define as markers of respectability.[549]

None of the women above are comfortably middle class – in that they were born into a different sort of space and so are still conscious about doing the right thing: their cultural capital is not quite 'embodied'. That is, although it could be perceived that these women were so well socially situated that they could be confident in it, in fact, they all expressed some anxiety about 'doing the right thing'. This has been highlighted as an issue for working class women by Lawlor as she develops Skeggs' ideas about respectability:

> Since respectability is coded as an inherent feature of 'proper' femininity, working-class women must constantly guard against being disrespectable, but no matter how carefully they do this, they are always at risk of being judged as wanting by middle-class observers.[550]

[548] Em45.
[549] Skeggs, *Formations*, pp.118 – 138.
[550] Stephanie Lawlor, 'Disgusted Subjects: the Making of Middle Class Identities', *The Sociological Review*, 3:3, (2005), 429 – 456, p.435.

That is, the social situation which the women are born into is that which continues to define them and they are, then, always seeking the respectability which might continue to elude them. 'Working class women are perceived as without any change of respectability which is pronounced in terms of femininity –those crossing a class boundary may be 'rendered comic'[551]. That is, there is always a danger that they will, 'get it wrong'. I would suggest then, that all the women in my research including those who might seem to be rich in social, cultural and economic capital, show their guardedness against being disrespectable. This was also revealed in the conversations I had with those respondents who have less obvious social status, and here I shall be referring to Tracey and Sandra.

Tracey lived with her two children in a local authority house and her husband was a labourer. However, Tracey had clear ideas about how her household was ordered, adamant that the tea would be on the table when her husband came in from work so the family could eat together in a respectable way.

> 'With me having little ones I need to have all the same tea. I'm not a person who likes waiting for food and I want them all to have the whole things. To be all together at one table. So usually I put it on for four o'clock, by the time he comes in the tea's on the table.'[552]

Tracey had been brought up going to church by her grandmother who lived in a market town in rural Northumberland. She talks about this as having given her a moral code and the knowledge of respectability. However, when she did go to church before the christening day in order to receive the candle, she was concerned about the behaviour of her older son. She

[551] Lawlor, p.435.
[552] Tr145.

expressed a sense of being watched (and, by implication judged) by both the members of the congregation and the other family whose child would be christened at the same time as hers.

> 'It makes me feel as if people are looking at us as if to say please make your child be quiet 'cos I'm trying to listen.'[553]

So, although Tracey's presence in church was legitimised by her grandmother who was devout, her presence now feels less legitimated, and perhaps that she is not quite respectable. Tracey has had cultural capital through her family but this seems to have been lost as she expresses a lack of confidence in attending church with her children.

Tracey talked about her daughter whom she considered the most likely to want to continue to attend church as she was quite 'spiritual'. She went on to tell me about how her daughter had been able to describe her long deceased grandmother and that she 'talks to family that's passed.'[554] Although Tracey had been 'spooked out' at first, she went on to say,

> 'It was just nice knowing that the likes of me grandma had come to her. Even though they never knew each other or anything like that.'[555]

It may be (although this would require further research) that Tracey's pride in her daughter's 'gift' is because of the respect and status within their close community which such a gift might confer.[556] Vieda Skultans did an ethnographic study of spiritualist groups in a town in Wales observing that the help and support that women found in spiritualism may offer an

[553] Tr121.
[554] Tr82.
[555] Tr131.
[556] Skultans, p.61.

alternative to a traditional feminine role.[557] Skultans also notes the 'power' associated with mediums which suggests status; in disclosing (albeit tentatively) her daughter's gift, Tracey is claiming such status.

8.3 The Performance of Motherhood

> When we think of motherhood we are supposed to think of Renoir's blooming women with rosy children at their knees, Raphael's ecstatic madonnas, some Jewish mother lighting the candles in a scrubbed kitchen on Shabbos…..[558]

Adrienne Rich wrote these words in 1976 in her book '*Of Woman Born*' in which she explores motherhood as experience and institution. As Rich suggests that Motherhood as an institution is very different from the actual experience of mothering that women encounter, she is, in fact, describing the public performance of motherhood which is so different from the private experience.

The discourse of 'good mothering'[559] prevails among mothers and seems to be entwined with the understanding of respectability as a performance. As Jane described the shock of becoming a mother with her first child, her narrative indicates the struggles she had with this 'good mothering' which she was determined to retrieve as she gathered her family together for the christening of her second baby:

[557] Skultans, p.83.
[558] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 2nd edn. (New York: Norton, 1986), p.275.
[559] Winnicott coined the term 'good enough mother': 'A good enough mother is one who meets a child's needs enough of the time so that it is not overwhelmed with anxiety, yet at the same time allows the child to separate from her.' Although Winnicott suggests that women have an innate ability to care for their children, his books are still designed to tell mothers how to best look after their babies. D.W. Winnicott, *The Child, The Family and the Outside World* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), p.49.

> ‘But I didn’t bath her for two weeks. I was frightened of her. I had bit of post natal depression I couldn’t bond. I was only 19, I was out every weekend, I was working in a pub. Enjoying life like a teenager does. And it was like a bomb had gone off.’[560]

Joanne Baker’s research refers to young mothers who have to ‘prove themselves up to the task within the discourse of good mothering.’[561] This ‘good mothering’ may be understood as being a ‘performance’ which, in Goffman’s terms, ‘will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society.’[562] Performance requires an ‘audience’ or ‘observers’, so is that aspect of identity which is displayed in public.[563] It is, therefore, key for the mother to find (or create) occasions when she can ‘perform’ motherhood in order that her status as mother, (or, more importantly as a ‘good’ mother) might be legitimated. The christening is one such occasion for a public performance of motherhood.

Skeggs suggests that ‘claiming respectability is a public characterisation.’[564] That is, these women are not independent selves but ‘full of duty and obligation generated through their relationship to others.’[565] The performance of this is very important as they seek respectability. The public nature of the christening (with a public usually invited, vetted and approved by the mother) offers an opportunity for the mother to display her affection for the child and her family and her competence as a mother to an ‘audience’ whose uncritical support can be relied upon:

[560] Jan116.
[561] Joanne Baker, ‘Young mothers in late modernity: sacrifice, respectability and the transformative neo-liberal subject’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12:3, 275-288**,** p.284.
[562] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.45.
[563] Goffman, pp.28-82.
[564] Skeggs, p.163.
[565] Skeggs, p.164.

> Given the particular stresses faced by young mothers and their commonly articulated need to 'prove' their suitability for the task, it is not surprising that they made statements of commitment and displays of affection and competence.[566]

Gemma is already teaching her daughter about respectability through her femininity – to be clean and smart and well dressed and not to wear trousers:

> 'I won't let her (daughter) go out of the house unless she's immaculately dressed, she doesn't wear leggings or trousers and I just think I really wanted a little girl so I want her to be a girl.'[567]

But what she is talking about is a public display. Gemma does not express concern at what happens in the privacy of the home, but outside the house.

In her study of working class women in Wales, Mannay recounts the story of Melanie who attends a church in a wealthy place just outside Hystryd in order that her children might attend the local (and more prestigious) school. Melanie feels uncomfortable and thinks she 'doesn't fit' in terms of her 'residence, religion or socio-economic status'. Nevertheless, Melanie continues to attend, determined to achieve, 'respectable motherhood through her children's education.' Her church attendance is part of her performance of motherhood:

> In this way the choice of doing motherhood entails a performance; and the smiles and the picture are smiles that disguise the pain of continual perceptions, assumptions and judgements that question the legitimacy of the family marked by their Hystryd postcode as defective.[568]

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[566] Baker, p.284.
[567] Ge64.
[568] Dawn Mannay, 'Achieving respectable motherhood? Exploring the impossibility of feminist and egalitarian ideologies against the everyday realities of lived Welsh working-class femininities' *Women's Studies International Forum,* 15, (2015),159-166. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.10.020 [accessed 10/7/15].

Melanie's performance is intended to deceive. None of the women I talked to referred to such insincerity but were concerned that everything on the day of the christening went smoothly: that is, was 'perfect'.[569] They did, however refer to 'others' whom they knew and whose motivations they considered insincere. In this 'othering' they distanced themselves from such behaviour.[570]

> 'My friend just had hers christened and she's just had it for the do and she doesn't believe in anything, she doesn't think there's anyone out there watching over her or anything, she's like you'll get a party out of it and the kids'll get some presents and most of mine are like want to just have a party.'[571]

Claire was interested in hearing about my research, as she herself had observed that perhaps the 'party' aspect of christenings might be an issue for the 'Church', through talking to people at the surgery and as she used social media. Claire expressed this as being unacceptable – perhaps even distasteful - as those she wanted to distance herself from seemed to be focussing on themselves rather than the baby.

> 'Quite a lot of people who get their children christened, all their emphasis is on the after do and getting drunk and how much they can drink. And in Facebook all I'm seeing isn't the baby in a beautiful dress but people slumped against the wall.'[572]

[569] Lisa in particular referred to the christening (and various elements of it) as 'perfect'.
[570] 'The construction of a mothering identity for these young women also commonly involved 'othering' in order to distance and disassociate themselves from vilified groups.' Joanne Baker, p.284.
[571] Sa105.
[572] Cl121.

At the same time as christening is a public event for the family as described in the previous chapters, and a public display of motherhood, it is a performance of respectability. For some this was more public than for others – only Linda had the christening as part of the main Sunday service saying that although she had invited only a few guests, she wanted the church to be full. That is, she was ensuring that the ritual would be public. Others had more private services outside the main Sunday service of that church. However, in inviting their own guests, they too were ensuring the public nature of the ritual, although within and so demonstrating membership of a community which they had chosen. Tracey and Gemma (who had experienced a 'shared' christening) felt the exposure of being in front of strangers. Gemma commented, 'I don't think I like being stood at the front and being watched.'[573]

The women I talked to (particularly before the christening day) were taking great care in the planning of food, guests and clothing, expressing anxiety that everything would go well. These women are not acting as independent selves but, 'full of duty and obligation generated through their relationship to others.'[574] The party is, then, significant not just in bringing the family together, reinforcing or developing a narrative, or even as a celebration but most importantly in creating and legitimising social identity. The comment made in the questionnaires, 'with many these days it is only an excuse to have a big party,'[575] indicates how little church members understand its significance.

The party is only part of the performance involved in the christening. It is important that it goes well, so that the hostesses can publicly prove themselves up to the task of mothering,[576]

[573] Ge18.
[574] Skeggs, *Formations*, p.164.
[575] Bede4 in answering a question about church attitudes to people coming for baptism.
[576] Joanne Baker discusses the need for the young mothers in her study to show their competence as 'good' mothers, p.284.

and therefore respectably feminine: 'Femininity for many working-class women is a performance but not performative.'[577] That is, despite its repetition, it never quite becomes unconsciously integral to their identity; in Judith Butler's words, 'an ideal that no-one actually inhabits'.[578] Mothers announce their maternal identity to those who are gathered and in so doing claim respectability. McMahon refers to announcements as key to constituting identity; that is, 'announcements are the identities we claim for ourselves.'[579] The performance of motherhood in evidence at the christening, is, then, a continuation of a performance which is ongoing and experienced in every public situation. It is this which Melissa Benn describes as part of the task of motherhood, 'In most households, women are still likely to be the organisational and emotional intelligence behind the scenes.'[580]

Although not all the mothers I talked to said that they had organised the christening – notably Laura had allowed Mick to do most of the organising – most considered it part of their responsibility as mothers. That is, the work of respectability remained theirs. The performance of their femininity may be judged in this public space. When I asked the women I talked to if they felt that it was part of their responsibility as mothers to ensure their children were christened, none of them thought of it as a religious responsibility but, rather, part of a general responsibility towards their children.

> 'Yes I've arranged everything. But then I do most things. 'Cos he's working away now. Most things I arrange to do with the baby and make most of the decision about her. I decide what she eats what she wears, when she goes to bed. It's down to me.'[581]

[577] Skeggs, 'Exchange, value and 'the self', Bourdieu and self', in *The Sociological Review*, 52, (2004), 75-95, p.88.
[578] Liz Kotz interviewing Judith Butler in Artforum 31 (1992), http://faculty.ucr.edu/~ewkotz/texts/Kotz-1992-Artforum-BulterInt.pdf [accessed 17/4/16].
[579] Martha McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity*, p.18.
[580] Melissa Benn, *Madonna and Child: Towards a New Politics of Motherhood* (London: Vintage, 1999), p.95.
[581] Em60.

8.4 Respectability and Symbolic Capital

Respectability may be hard work, requiring individuals to honour the past and to negotiate their position within the social space. This is described by Brown et al who write about respectability among a group of elderly working-class men and women in Wales, observing that, 'the exercise of respectability required a vigilant social activity and constant, complex negotiation.'[582] They argue that respectability may be considered as a form of symbolic capital in itself, 'authorising and sustaining one's own and one's family's position in social space.'[583] It is, they believe, part of social and 'diligent' performance which manages the boundaries between the respectable and the scandalous.[584] This diligent performance was evident throughout the conversations I had with the mothers I talked to as they expressed their anxieties about their choices and their desire to do 'the right thing'.

Capital[585] is understood to be a resource which is both relational and (when recognised as valuable) exchangeable.[586] Theories about capital have developed from the work of Karl Marx who argues that 'capital' rather than being fixed in economic terms should, rather, be understood in more social terms as key to capitalist (and therefore inbalanced) social relations of power.[587] James Coleman sees it as key to the understanding of social structures: social capital is relational, depending upon trustworthy networks of exchange and reciprocity.

[582] Brian Brown, Sally Baker, Graham Dayl, 'Lives Beyond Suspicion: Gender and the Construction of Respectability in Mid-twentieth Century Rural North Wales'. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 51:4, (2011), 370-386, p.376.
[583] Brown et al, p.379.
[584] Brown et al, p.383.
[585] Both Coleman and Portes would trace the origin of the theory of social capital to the work of Durkheim: E Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997 [1893]).
[586] Alejandro Portes, 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998), 1-24.
[587] Karl Marx. *Capital, Vol. 3* (New York: International Press, 1967 [1894]).

'Individuals in social structures with high levels of obligations outstanding at any time have more social capital on which they can draw.'[588]

Bourdieu developed ideas about 'capital', arguing that it takes several forms and is always an important factor in class formation. However, it may not always be recognised and is therefore perpetuated. He calls this taken-for-grantedness 'habitus'.[589] This habitus becomes an integral part of the person, embodied and unexamined which, 'like a suntan, cannot be done at second hand.'[590] Bourdieu's theory refers mainly to economic, social and cultural capital, although he does refer to 'religious' capital.[591] These all may become symbolic capital which is 'transformed and legitimated' from other forms of capital.

Bourdieu considers the symbolic practice of societies as being imposed and perpetuated as part of a class structure which 'legitimates' capital, thus ensuring its symbolic power. This symbolic capital may be perceived as 'missing' in the lives of the women in my study - even by those young women who had accrued economic capital. Even Emily, whose newly acquired wealth expressed her concerns about social acceptability: talking about her husband's family's reluctance to accept her and worrying that her house might reveal a lack of taste: she still lacked embodied cultural capital. The mothers, particularly from working-class backgrounds in the North East of England, found the conversion of other forms of capital into symbolic capital very difficult. The accrual of symbolic capital is a key element of christening realised through the public performance of motherhood and legitimated by the Church.

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[588] James Coleman, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', in, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, ed. by Craig Calhoun et al 1st edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 110-116, p.112.
[589] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory*, 7:1 (1989), 14-25, p.17.
[590] Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', p.243.
[591] This is discussed by David Swartz, 'Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Pierre Bourdieu's Political Economy of Symbolic Power', *Sociology of Religion,* 57:1, (1996), 71-85.

8.5 Conclusion

In the baptism of the child the mother gains that respectability both for herself and for the child. This is complex and depends upon a successful public performance of family, motherhood and of the rite itself (the vicar, the building, the water and the candle make this legitimate). It is through the child's being accepted by the church as an institution (in Kate's words: 'an acknowledgement of the baby by the Church'[592]) that she becomes acceptable in society thus gaining status which may be shared with the mother. While this may have crudely reflected the now almost obsolete practice of unbaptised children (and unchurched mothers) being refused admission into the houses of neighbours and relatives,[593] and unbaptised babies being refused burial in consecrated ground,[594] the desire to be both accepted by and acceptable to society is a complex one, driven by both a fear of failure and a need to fulfil social obligations. The story Gemma tells negotiates between her desire to fulfil the obligations she has towards her daughter and her family while maintaining her social obligations and not losing face.

While I have situated these accounts within a framework of 'capital' which is mainly social, it is symbolic capital which is accrued in the ritual element of baptism. Through the baptism itself the child and mother gain cultural capital in a number of ways: through the connection with the institution – the Church; through the legitimation of the child as his/her identity is confirmed in the public performance of baptism; through the legitimation of the mother who is seen to be performing her motherhood properly. As the institution of the Church is part of

[592] Ka94.
[593] This is described by Gemma.
[594] This is discussed by Chiara Garattini, 'Creating Memories: Material Culture and Infantile Death in Contemporary Ireland', in *Mortality* 12:2, (2007), 193-206.

the power structures of the culture of the North-east, the cultural capital gained may be transformed by its legitimation into symbolic capital. Bourdieu also argues that it is women who are assigned to the management of the symbolic capital of the family.[595] The family is key at and for the performance of the baptism, and this contributes to the creation of symbolic capital not just for the child and mother but for the whole family.

Many of those who participated in my research, while they might have increased their social or economic capital during their life, continued mainly to inhabit the 'inherited social space'[596] into which they had been born. That is, they still made meaning for and about themselves primarily from within their ascribed identity: none of the women had been brought up in families which were 'middle class' although they may have been aspirational, so although their capital may have increased, they were still socially situated as at their birth.

These women both perform and are positioned by motherhood. The christening is an occasion when this performance is very public, but the performance itself is ongoing and complex. The satisfactory nature of this performance reveals their own respectability and confers respectability upon their family and their children. So, as they express a wish 'for the best' for their child, part of enabling that involves bringing them into a capitally rich (or at least richer) social space and, as they do so, expressing a desire for their child to 'flourish'.

[595] Pierre Bourdieu, 'On the Family as a Realised Category', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13:3, (1996), 19 – 26.
[596] Skeggs, *Formations*, p.8.

Chapter Nine: Baptism as Blessing

Although most of the women with whom I talked rarely mentioned their faith, many of them referred to their child as a blessing, or of the baptism as being about blessing their child. In this chapter, I shall be discussing the term 'Blessing', seeking not so much to define it, as to explore its meaning as it is used by the mothers in my study and by theologians. So, here I give an 'etic' perspective, that is, in Kunin's words, 'creating the explanation rather than discovering an explanation that pre-existed the study.'[597]

In understanding what blessing means, I shall pay attention to the muted voices of mothers alongside the voices of theologians. In this chapter I suggest that blessing for the women in my study is about; promise, hope, success, thanksgiving and flourishing. I explore blessing as both future promise and acknowledgement of what has been: 'Blessing is understood to be fundamentally about God's faithfulness in the past and hoped-for presence in the future.'[598]

> 'You are pretty much saying thank you for creating this child. Please sort of protect her innocence and welcome her to your church. This is my thanks. Giving you my child.'[599]

9.1 Blessing as Promise

> 'So if anything happened she had been blessed by God. And God would take care of her.'[600]

[597] Seth D. Kunin and Jonathan Miles Watson, 'Introduction' in *Theories of Religion: a Reader*, ed. by Seth D. Kunin and Jonathan Miles Watson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p.9. A more detailed explanation of this anthropological methodology was given in chapter 2.
[598] Christian Scharen, 'Blessing' in, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*', ed. by Bonnie J Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 80-88, p.85.
[599] Sar95.
[600] Ebba8.

In the story of God's revelation of himself to his people, the story of Abram and Sarai is a story of blessing, 'Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'[601]

As they set out from a relatively stable life in Ur into unknown territory Abram and Sarai take with them the promise and the blessing of God. This promise is formalised into a covenant relationship, marking the beginning of God's relationship with a whole people: 'I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant'.[602] So the blessing and the covenantal relationship are linked, and the story of Abraham and Sarah has become a symbol of God's blessing. This covenant relationship indicates the trust Abram and Sarai have in God amidst uncertainty, and awareness of the dangers ahead to be circumvented.

> A divine promise is the promise of a future which God is going to bring about. When God promises something he is bound to keep his promise, for his own sake and for the sake of his glory. His whole being is faithfulness.[603]

Moltmann believes that this promise is deeply embedded in human personhood, allowing space within a relationship with God for identity to develop. So, as an individual develops, God promises to remain in relationship with them, allowing them to thrive. It is in relationship with God that we become fully human. However, the promise of God is not made to individuals, nor even to God's people Israel, but is universal.

[601] Genesis 12:1 – 3.
[602] Genesis 17:7.
[603] Jurgen Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning*, trans Margaret Kohl, (London: SCM, 2004), p.3.

I would suggest that when mothers ask for their children to be blessed, they are acknowledging this promise of God's faithfulness to their child. The blessing of God comprises an ongoing commitment to relationship. For some mothers this is expressed as a desire for protection, others for 'care', and for others the blessing is that they are known by God. As Sandra told me the story of her difficulty in conceiving, her miscarrying, and anxiety throughout her final pregnancy, she described her desire that her children be protected:

> 'I just want [God] to be watching over my kids as well, if there is just that slight chance that he could guide them in the right way, or help them in any way, then I'd rather do it.'[604]

Perhaps as the mothers in my study regard their new-born babies they recognise their frailty and their own powerlessness to absolutely protect their child from harm. In acknowledging, even when their child is so young, the limits of their capacity to care, then perhaps, as they will need to invoke 'magical aids' (that is, assistance from the realm of the sacred[605]) or in the case of the mothers in my study, the blessing of God through baptism. Rob was keen to distinguish his understanding of God's blessing from what he perceived as superstitious beliefs about baptism:

> 'Yes I think there's a lot of superstition that comes out when they say that. When you unpick it a bit I think they think the child is going to be safe and not have any accidents. When it comes to the homily I will talk about God's grace and that God loves this child, but this child will still experience all those things people experience, they're not protected through this baptism.

[604] San56.
[605] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 2nd edn. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997 [1971]), p.507.

> But I'll want to say that God holds on to them regardless of what happens.'[606]

9.2 The Promises Made in Baptism

We can interpret the blessings of baptism as being not just those of God, but also those which derive from the promises made by the godparents. Several of the questionnaire respondents highlighted 'the promises' as an important symbol of baptism.[607] These promises are performative and the mothers expect their chosen godparents to keep their word. 'In their promises people commit themselves and make themselves dependable.'[608]

> 'I think its nice for the baby to have those people be able to say that they will be there for him. For me, it was as much about the godparents as it was about anything else. People being willing to show that symbol towards your kids and things.'[609]

The promise Julia is describing here as a symbol, represents an ongoing relationship of trust. As a single mother, it was important for her to develop a support network for her son. Moltmann describes such promises as binding as they suggest an ongoing relationship of commitment and trust: 'Life together in society is possible only on the basis of promise and faithfulness, dependability and trust.'[610] This dependability is a blessing for the child. On the whole parents did not choose the most religious of their circle as godparents, but those who were most trustworthy, that is, those whose promise would be a blessing: 'Godparents were chosen because they were good role models and close to the family'[611].

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[606] Rob, 177.
[607] 'The parents and godparents making a commitment in front of everyone to witness the child been baptised' Aid14.
[608] Jurgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 2000), p.94.
[609] Jul126-7.
[610] Moltmann, *Experiences*, p.100.
[611] Elf6.

Roy Rappaport describes one of the key elements of ritual form as being its performance, without which there is no ritual. In fact, he argues that ritual may be defined as the 'performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.'[612] The same is true of blessing: without the performance of the promises, there is no blessing.

Rappaport has relied upon J.L. Austin's ideas of performativity in his 'Speech Act Theory'. Austin argued that words do more than describe or explain, they may also 'perform', that is, 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action.'[613] That is, language is used not just to describe or explain the world, but to act upon it: the words themselves are transformatory. Austin says, 'Thus, 'I promise to….' obliges me – puts on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle.'[614] It is interesting here that, for linguist-philosopher Austin, promises are spiritual and, although he concedes that 'false promises' may be made, they are not 'lies', but do undermine the whole performance. Rappaport suggests, however, that the conventions of the performance, the ritual enactment, make statements into being.[615] That is, the validity of the performance does not rest on either the intention or enactment of the promises.

These observations about the validity of speech acts as part of ritual performance, are important for the promise of baptism – the parents were careful to choose those whom they trusted although some did express a dissatisfaction that the godparents had not continued to build a relationship with their child. While this breaking of their promise may undermine the

[612] Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [1999]), p.24.
[613] J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press:1962), pp.6 – 7.
[614] Austin, p.10.
[615] Rappaport pp.116 – 117.

blessing of that one relationship, it does not compromise the efficacy of the baptism itself. None of the parents who expressed such a disappointment indicated that the nature of the baptism itself was in any way undermined by the unfulfilled promise. It was enough, I would suggest, that the conventions of the rite were fulfilled in its performance. The promises of the godparents may be defined, in Austin's terms, as 'commissives', that is they 'do not bring into being the states of affairs with which they are concerned, but merely bring into being the commitment of those performing them to do so sometime in the future.'[616]

One of the concerns of the clergy is the honesty with which godparents make promises: the words which they say oblige them to spiritual support of the child. Garry, in particular, expressed his concern at asking godparents to make promises which seemed to him to encourage a lack of integrity, 'I don't think they reflect at all where people are at….and as I say, look at the godparents' faces. Even getting them to say them is difficult.'[617]

However, Rob suggests that there is some acknowledgement of the significance of the promises being made here – that hesitation reflects an understanding of their undertaking:

> 'There's obviously a mixed thing when they are wondering whether they really believe it and the others who seem to be having a bit of a snigger to their friends in the congregation like I'm saying this and think about what I get up to, but there are others who you think are taking some of this stuff on board.'[618]

[616] Rappaport, p.115.
[617] Garry 32.
[618] Rob 122.

9.3 Blessing as Hope

Moltmann develops his theology of hope with reference in particular to children as he argues that, 'sons and daughters are bearers of hope for humanity.'[619] It is this hope for the future which is expressed by the mothers I talked to. Gemma talked about her hopes for her child, she also talked about these in terms of the christening: 'If there is a God she's having a good start'. The woman who wrote, 'I want God to love her and protect her in a way I never felt as a child,'[620] longed for a better life for her child than the deprivation and rejection she had experienced.

Moltmann suggests that the messianic promise fulfilled in the Christ-child is fulfilled in every child. He quotes the Jewish proverb: 'In every child the Messiah can be born.'[621] It is not just in the incarnation that the encounter with the almighty God may be celebrated, but in the fact of God becoming a child, 'If we see the particular birth of the child of promise as mirroring the promise of children in general, we can cry with Romantic poet Clemens Brentano, 'What a mystery is a child!''[622] The sense of awe expressed here by Brentano is repeated in the words of the women in my study as they refer to their child as 'perfect', 'a miracle', 'a bundle of joy'. Those women who had experienced problems with fertility and who understood the pain of loss also understood the wonder of life: the birth of their child marks both a hope fulfilled and a future hope for a life to come.

Moltmann suggests three reasons why children are 'incarnate hopes of a fulfilled life':

[619] Jurgen Moltmann, (2004), p.14.
[620] Bede3.
[621] Moltmann, (2004), p.4.
[622] Moltmann,(2004), p.5.

a. Every child that is born and accepted represents a new beginning of life.
b. With every new beginning of life the hope for the fullness of life we call eternal acquires a new chance and a new assurance.
c. We perceive in them embodiments of God's hopes for us. God created everything in finished form but he created human beings in hope.[623]

Both human hope and divine hope are embodied in the child; so in each generation anew, God longs for humanity to become true to itself and to Godself. Timothy Radcliffe expresses this more simply: 'we baptise children so they will not be like us.'[624] That is, through the child, the parents might turn around disappointments in their own life, hoping that their child will not make the same mistakes as they have done. The 'good start' expressed by these parents, seems to correlate to the 'new start' expressed in the theology of baptism, but which is for them as much as for their child.

As McLemore points out, hope for the child is often confused with a parental desire to prove their own worth, resulting in an 'idolatry of children'. Anthropologist, David Lancy describes the children this idolatry gives rise to as 'cherub' children, 'a cherub is a plump angelic child-like creature that personifies innocence.'[625] However, this symbol of innocent childhood is neither secure nor universal, the innocence expressed is not necessarily that of the child, but rather a longed for innocence of society:

> Cherub children are so attractive, so desirable, so much a reflection of our longing for innocence and naivety – while still allowing us the pursuit of

[623] Moltmann, (2004), p.16.
[624] Timothy Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p.18.
[625] David F Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattels, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.83.

> sensual indulgence and materialism – that they've become essential components of 'the good life'.[626]

So, the hope expressed in blessing is a hope for the child: that she will make good choices and have a good life. But it is more than this, as the child represents something of the parents' own longing both for fulfilment and for a return to innocence. The hope of blessing, then, anticipates a redeemed future for the parent as it anticipates blessing for the child.

9.4 Blessing as Thanksgiving

> Now it's a kind of thanksgiving service. They do want to say kind of thank you. I think people want to thank God for everything going on in their life that's going well.[627]

In the responses to the questionnaire, there was a sense of wishing to give thanks for or to celebrate, the birth of their child: 'Joyful day, blessing our child and rejoicing that our child was born safe and healthy.' [628] For Denise Ackermann, thanksgiving in itself may be considered as a blessing, 'Our ability to experience thankfulness shapes our identity. It is key to human well-being.'[629] For her, gratitude which acknowledges God's grace is transformative, from which comes an abundance of living which is blessed. Perhaps this also is true for the mothers – the thanksgiving they express in bringing their child for baptism (and so, to God) is in itself a blessing which shapes their lives. This thanksgiving was notable particularly in the questionnaire responses.

[626] Lancy, p.111.
[627] Mark, 46-7.
[628] Aid3.
[629] Denise M.Ackermann, *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey: Ordinary Blessings* (Cape Town: Lux Verbi, 2014), p.217.

However, when I asked about thanksgiving during the conversations I had, the response was rather more ambivalent; the sense of gratitude acknowledged was not necessarily directed toward God. Lisa initially said 'No' when I asked her if the baptism was a way of giving thanks to God but she came back to the question (although she did not actually name God as the focus of her gratitude):

> 'Thanks to God, what do you mean by that? I don't know if I answered it correctly. I said no but that's not what I meant, 'cos we're so grateful for her. So yes we do thank (hesitation) every day for having such a beautiful little girl.'[630]

Linda, whose child was born after a course of IVF and who was delighted to have him, had other foci for her gratitude:

> 'I do feel blessed to have him, but then again science has been a big part of that. There are other factors as well, but I am extremely grateful.[631]

This thanksgiving is retrospective: a thanksgiving for the blessing of the present and of those who have led up to this present blessing. Moltmann writes, 'The present and the future, experience and hope, initially clash in Christian faith.'[632] But I would suggest that the 'experience' to which he refers is not merely the present, it is also the past and encompasses a whole narrative. For the women in my study it involves at least the story of the conception of their child (with its hopes and disappointments) but more often the story of their life (including people, places and times of faith). The thanksgiving is a thanksgiving for the

[630] Lisa101.
[631] Lin23.
[632] Moltmann, (2000), p.89.

blessings which have brought us to this point; it appreciates the present as it anticipates the future.

The hesitancy of the mothers described here is not surprising, and yet the gratitude expressed by these women for their child is legitimated in baptism.[633] This corresponds to research on the spirituality of birth which influences the practice of midwifery, and has been particularly influenced by Jennifer Hall who describes childbirth as, 'Kairos time, a time that touched the visible and invisible bringing feelings of divinity and holiness to the occasion.'[634]

Jane who had experienced post-natal depression with her first child and whose mother had died just before the second was born, although acknowledging her love for her children, did not express any thanksgiving. She was finding life demanding:

> 'yes I think all children are gifts, but yes he's given them to us but they are hard work. We shouldn't have to say thanks to God.'[635]

The thanksgiving element of baptism is not irrelevant to Jane, that is, she can recognise her children as 'gifts' which suggests that she is aware of a narrative of thanksgiving associated with childbirth, but the story that she brings to the baptism (of sleepless nights and isolation) is not experienced as one of blessing. For her, the narrative is much more about bringing the family together to celebrate a birth in contrast with the previous family gatherings for

[633] Hans J. Mol argues that religion is 'sacralisation of identity' and may legitimise the socialisation process, *Identity and the Sacred* (New York: The Free Press, 1976) particularly, p.10.
[634] Susan Crowther and Jennifer Hall 'Spirituality and spiritual care in and around childbirth' *Women and Birth,* 28:2, (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2015.01.001, [accessed 1/7/15], p.3.
[635] Ja108

funerals. As I further consider the concept of children as gifts from God, I shall consider Jane's instinct to celebrate the birth of her child rather than give thanks for her.

9.5 The Gift of Children

When we consider children to be gifts, there is an implied condition of reciprocity. This is key in Mauss' theory of gift exchange;[636] this is no different when children are 'gift'. For many the response to receiving the 'gift' of a child is to reciprocate in some way or remain indebted. However, as Jane's responses reveal, the hard work that children entail may not always be experienced as a 'gift' which presumes the existence of a benevolent God.

This ambivalence is captured by Monopoulos who writes that the gift is, in essence, paradoxical, being marked by both 'gravity and reciprocity, linearity and circularity, excess and exchange.'[637] Monopoulos describes his relationship with his parents as an example of this tension, 'I have been given 'the gift of life' but sometimes feel an almost crushing weight of debt and obligation towards them.' [638] For him, it is to his parents, and not to God, that this gratitude is owed. However, Monopoulos also considers the possibility that, 'creation's gifting may be a co-gifting', that is a co-operation stemming from the 'divine letting-be' as expressed in the first chapter of Genesis.[639] Monopoulos suggests that rather than being indebted to God for his gift, the proper response to the possibly divinely co-gifted gift of creation is its affirmation and celebration.[640] If we can say that creation is manifest in the birth of a child which can be seen as a co-creation between God and the mothers, then

[636] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Arabic Societies*, trans. by W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).
[637] Mark Manolopoulos, 'Gift Theory As Cultural Theory: Reconciling the Ir/religious', *Culture and Religion*, 8:1 (2007), 1-13, p.3.
[638] Manolopoulos, p.3.
[639] Manopoulos, p.5.
[640] Manopoulos. p.9.

Monopoulos' ideas seem to suggest that the response to this 'gift' is affirmation and celebration rather than indebtedness.

Children, if they can be considered as gifts at all, may be considered to be inalienable gifts. They are sacred objects given by God but which always belong to God and as such are inalienable and must not be given away. While Mauss suggested that inalienability was essentially spiritual, Godelier views it in a more complex way, suggesting that, 'the effect of religion is not to endow common properties with an inalienable character, but to impose a sacred character on the prohibition of its alienation.'[641] As inalienable gifts, children cannot be given away nor sold because the 'hau'[642] of the gift still belongs to God.[643] Gibran expresses this idea when he writes, in his popular spiritual writing: 'Your children are not your children they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself'.[644] Godelier suggests that the 'hau' of a person remained present in the gift given so bringing a pressure on the receiver either to give back or to reciprocate.[645]

I would suggest, then, that in considering the child as gift, the recipient of that gift (the mother or father) would be unable to reciprocate the gift and remains indebted to the donor – God: 'in the manner of supernatural beings – humankind finds itself confronted with beings with whom no equivalent exchange is possible.'[646] This inequality of power manifest in the giving and receiving of goods means, Godelier believes, that there can be no conflict between 'men' and the gods. However, the obligation to reciprocate is a powerful one (expressed by

[641] Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.44.
[642] Maus suggests that a binding force is present between the giver and receiver. He called this the 'hau' of the gift. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, p.15.
[643] Children as inalienable is discussed in Annette B Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
[644] Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (London: Pan Books, 1980), p.20.
[645] Godelier, p.44.
[646] Godelier, p.186.

Mauss as a desire to 'give back more than we have received'[647]) which operates at all levels of society and is revealed by those who talk about baptism as an opportunity for giving thanks, even when they are uncertain about the object of their gratitude. However, Mauss's fourth obligation was not to give back, but to pass on. In this sense it may be considered to be intergenerational, in the sense that the passing on is connective. His 'giving to the gods' suggests a linking implicit in the gift giving to a source of social and spiritual significance. For the families in my research, it could be argued that this source is the family itself.

9.6 The Blessings of Success

For many, to talk about God's blessings is to talk about material success. Emily expressed her surprise and thankfulness for the recent material success she and her family were enjoying, although this was tinged by a sense that it might all be transitory. She referred to this success, including the birth of her child, as 'blessing'; for her, the baptism was partly about, 'making God aware that we are so grateful for what has been given to us.'[648]

Christian Scharen argues that while blessing may be understood as a privilege, it is actually a responsibility, as blessings which grow from God's grace are about community rather than the individual. He refers to his own research on the religious beliefs of youth in North America who, 'largely share a conception of God as a cosmic sugar daddy: we do our duty and God is there to provide for our needs and shower us with blessings.'[649] Scharen argues

[647] Mauss, p.84.
[648] Em7.
[649] Christian Scharen, *Blessing*, p.82.

that this reflects the belief commonly held that 'God cares for my happiness'. But this, he suggests, is for the whole of creation rather than for the individual.[650]

Nevertheless, the mothers here in seeking blessing, are also seeking some kind of good fortune for their children, an acknowledgement that God does indeed care for their children. Some articulate this as 'protection' or a desire for 'the best'. The christening gifts they have received of money, money boxes, silver cutlery, silver mugs, and jewellery suggest a desire for the material success of the child: Claire's grandmother travelled to Edinburgh to buy exactly the right silver spoon.[651] While this might be dismissed as superstition, if we were to take it seriously it might also be interpreted as blessing, as it is associated with abundance and 'The Good Life'.

The understanding of blessing as being manifest in good fortune and which is described by Emily, may be found in various places in the Old Testament, particularly the psalms, 'For the Lord God is a sun and shield. He bestows favour and honour.' (Psalm 84).[652] Gordon Lathrop suggests that the core biblical tradition, 'understands blessing as good words before God; the acknowledgement in thanksgiving that God is the source of every good, including the current one being celebrated; then the bold beseeching of God's fidelity and gifts in this particular case, which is also a case of need.'[653] So, for Lathrop, blessing (as understood in the Jewish and Christian traditions) is about thanksgiving and beseeching.[654] That is, it combines both the retrospective and the anticipated, acknowledging God's presence

[650] Scharen, p.85.
[651] Cl100.
[652] The nature and understanding of blessing in the Old Testament has been addressed most thoroughly by Claus Westermann, (trans Keith Crim) *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1978).
[653] Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), p.85.
[654] Lathrop, p.87.

throughout. He argues that blessing is as much about a continued relationship with God as it is about abundance.

The connection of blessing to material abundance is the focus of some Christian teaching, referred to as the 'prosperity gospel':[655] 'it promises prosperity and health in this world and does so in a rather pragmatic way, resembling what we would commonly call 'good luck'.[656] Although Davidson is, on the whole, critical of 'prosperity' teaching, he does draw out some nuances, suggesting that such teaching attracts those who have few options in life, that is with little power and capital, and whose desire in life is to have 'enough' of necessities rather than 'too much' of luxuries. So, for many, the prosperity gospel suggests a bettering of prospects rather than merely consumerist acquisition. Blessedness, throughout the Christian tradition is about abundance.

Nevertheless, the blessing sought by the mothers is associated with God's abundance. A mother who was also baptism visitor in her church told me that she thought the mothers she met were 'wanting the best' for their child, however that may be understood. In a society in which 'the best' is often expressed materially, this will involve material things, although the baptism itself expresses a desire for something more. As the mothers I talked to described the dress and the party, the gifts and balloons which they had planned for the christening they were, to some extent, performing their identity as family. However, they were also expressing, in an embodied way, their hopes in and for their child; a desire for the 'Good Life'; a yearning for flourishing.

[655] George Marsden suggests that the prosperity gospel, with its focus on wealth, is the same as Weber's 'Spirit of capitalism' in its requirement for what is known as the 'Protestant work ethic'. 'The Gospel of Wealth, the Social Gospel and the Salvation of Souls in Nineteenth Century America', *Fides et Historia*, 5, (1972), 10 – 21.
[656] Andrew Davison, *Blessing* (Norfolk: Canterbury Press, 2014), p.31.

9.7 Flourishing

In his treatise 'Ethics',[657] Aristotle describes the conditions he believes which allow the individual to achieve 'eudaimonia'.[658] It relates to two kinds of virtues of character: those which are self-regarding and those which are about friendship and social commitment, but as Hardie discusses, Aristotle approaches this question in a tentative manner.[659] Virtue is, then, about developing character traits which dispose an individual to certain forms of behaviour which may be focussed on the social good, 'happiness does not consist in pastimes and amusements but in virtuous activities.'[660] In fact, Aristotle argues that 'happiness' is a form of contemplation – the prime activity of the gods – although the contemplative would also need, 'a sufficiency of health and food'; a degree of self sufficiency; and competence (but not necessarily expertise):[661] 'what is best and pleasantest for each creature is that which intimately belongs to it.'[662] However, the relational aspects of humanity are equally important to Aristotle's understanding of the good life, as philosopher Hardie comments, 'The family and the state and other forms of association as well, are necessary for the full realisation of any man's capacity for living well.'[663]

Using Aristotle's thesis, Christian Smith asks the question, 'What does it mean for a human person to live a good life?' Although the answer is complex, he considers it by retranslating the Greek word 'Eudaimonia' which he calls 'flourishing' or 'thriving': 'Normal people want to be as happy, fulfilled, flourishing and achieving their potential as well as they understand it

[657] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans J.A.K. Thomson (London: Penguin Classics, 1955).
[658] In the translation to which I refer here, eudaimonia is translated as 'happiness' although scholars suggest that its meaning does not correspond directly to a modern understanding of 'happiness'.
[659] W.F.R. Hardie, 'Aristotle on the Best Life for a Man', *Philosophy*, 54:207, (1979), 35 – 50.
[660] Aristotle, p.302.
[661] Aristotle, p.308.
[662] Aristotle, p.305.
[663] Hardie, 'The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics', *Philosophy,* 40:154 (1965), 277-295.

and how to achieve it.'[664] A life well lived is a life in which a person knows she is loved and loves in return. Perhaps it is this which the normal mothers of my study want for their children. Is this what they mean when they say they want 'the best' for their child?

> 'I want him to be the best person he can be. So by getting him christened I am starting that and he can decide what's right and wrong.'[665]

Hocart also argues that baptism is about the flourishing of the child. He suggests that ritual is essentially about the conferring of life – health, wealth and fertility. 'Ask any English mother why her children have been christened, and, taken by surprise , she will have no answer....if you have patience, however, some day she will unwittingly say that she believes baptism to promote life.'[666] It is, I believe, the promotion of life in its richest form that the mothers I talked to are seeking for their children.

9.7.a Natality and Flourishing

Feminist philosopher of religion, Grace Jantzen, although writing from a different perspective from Smith, also suggests that for life to be lived well, it needs to be lived in relationships of love. She argues that traditional theology is too obsessed by death and so absorbed by 'necrophilic imagery'[667], this had led to theology that is about violence and redemption by an external saviour. She argues that these are man's structures of meaning: erected in order to master death, 'death therefore defines life'.[668] In defiance of this, Jantzen adopts and develops Hannah Arendt's concept of natality. Birth, which is embodied and has been

[664] Christian Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2015), p.204.
[665] Cl61.
[666] A.M. Hocart, *The Life-giving Myth and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2004 [1952]), p.47.
[667] Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Theology of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.129.
[668] Jantzen, p.132.

experienced by 'every person who has ever lived', disrupts the imaginary of death. Natality, then, 'is a fundamental human condition'.[669]

In addition to birth, she argues, each 'natal' receives a welcome from its mother and community, 'Indeed without at least a minimum welcome, an infant could not survive.'[670] So the story of each individual is one of birth, of welcome, and of participation in the world. It is this welcome which leads to flourishing, and public participation which enables its flourishing.[671] She regards natality as a particularly fruitful concept for a renewed understanding of the Christian message and as resonating with feminist concerns in that natality affirms the connectedness of human relationships (in that no-one can be born alone) as well as our embodied nature.[672]

The embodied theology of natality suggests growth which is creative and fruitful. It leads, Jantzen argues, 'to an idea of the divine source and ground. An imminent divine incarnated within us and between us'.[673] So, natals are not to be rescued from the inevitability of death, but rather grow in relationships to become more fully human, and in so doing, divine. This inter-relatedness of humanity and creation, is an expression of love as natality. It follows that in their very being, the babies being brought to christening embody the loving relationships through which they have been created. The sense of being divine is expressed through love

[669] Jantzen, p.144.
[670] Jantzen, p.149.
[671] Jantzen, p.160.
[672] Jantzen, p.141.
[673] Jantzen, p.161.

and in their preciousness. It is this preciousness which is being expressed by the women about their babies, 'they all think their baby is precious...'[674]

Mothers want their precious child to avoid mistakes they have made, to have opportunities which they have not had, to do well despite the odds, to flourish. I think it is best expressed in interview with Gemma, 'I can't imagine loving anyone as much as I love Sally, and I think if we don't have any more we can afford to have a nice life and hopefully bring her up properly,'[675] then in the follow-up interview, 'I felt like crying at her first birthday, I was so overwhelmed at her growing up.'[676] The love that Gemma expresses here is actually, an expression of the divine as she acknowledges her incomprehension of the power of that love and desire for her daughter to flourish. That flourishing is expressed materially – with two christening dresses, matching outfits and the desire for a 'nice' life – it is in no way counter-cultural, but this should not detract from the 'becoming' which Sally embodies on behalf of the family.

9.8 Blessing as Encountering God's Love

Like Jantzen, Riet Bons-Storm, also challenges a traditional theological understanding of redemption arguing that, 'To become whole means: to become a person that is transparent in her/his pursuit of a good, a just life, not based on fear for punishment, but trusting the gracious love of God'.[677] She suggests that the people who participated in her research, 'long

[674] This was a comment made to me in the initial stage of the research by a woman who was a baptism visitor, helping to prepare families for baptism.
[675] Ge64.
[676] Ge37.
[677] Riet Bons-Storm, 'Beyond the Obsession with Guilt and Atonement: Towards a Theology of Blessing and its Implications for our Practices' in, *Secularisation Theories, Religious Identity and Practical Theology: Developing International Practical Theology for the 21st Century* ed. by Wilhelm Gräb and Lars Chatbonnier (Berlin, London: Global, 2009), 65 – 87, p.78.

to be blessed'.[678] For these women and men on the margins of the Church, Jesus' death was not the most important element but rather, 'faith in an unconditionally loving God who was with them in their daily lives.'[679]

Davison caricatures Bons-Storm's position as rejecting salvation:[680] this is not her argument. Rather, she suggests that redemption can be found through the incarnation, 'The concept of God recognizable in human beings is incarnation, an ongoing phenomenon. Because God is a God of love and can be imaged as longing to be near his people.'[681] She refers to the Aaronite blessing in Numbers chapter six as being the archetype of blessing. In this, God turns his face towards the one who is blessed, illuminating them and their life. Humankind is inspired (has life breathed into them as in the story of Genesis) by the nearness of God's face. However close though God may be or become to the ones who are blessed, they still have responsibility and accountability for their own decisions. 'To live as a blessed person means aiming at integrity.' [682]

Bons-Storm's theology of blessing here is key in developing a theology of baptism which is not about the correction of original sin or admittance to heaven which traditional Augustinian theology of infant baptism would suggest. Baptism, then, brings the baptisand (child or adult) near to God in order to live with integrity and blessing.

[678] Bons Storm, p.79.
[679] Bons-Storm, p.79.
[680] Davison, p.82.
[681] Bons-Storm, p.80.
[682] Bons-Storm, p.81.

> 'In [corporal ritual] we offer our whole selves and responsiveness to the other who confirms us in being, establishing us as ourselves, blessing us body and soul.'[683]

9.9 Conclusion

In this theological reflection, I have argued that the word 'Blessing' encapsulates the aspects of baptism which mothers consider important. These blessings were not all spoken about in terms of 'God', and some were nuanced, but all the mothers talked about some aspect of 'flourishing' for their child. For many of the participants in the research, baptism offers an anticipation of prosperity: God's blessing, bestowed in baptism, involves protecting and caring for their child into the future.

The work of Jantzen and Bons-Storm is helpful in beginning to develop a theology of baptism which acknowledges natality, while anticipating a life of integrity and flourishing. 'Blessing' in this framework may be understood as living in ongoing relationships of love with God and with others.

[683] Roger Grainger, *The Language of the Rite* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), p.153.

Chapter Ten: Folk Religion

The data described in the early chapters of this thesis and its subsequent interpretation reveals the gulf between the expectations and understanding of those who would have their babies christened and the explicit theology of church and clergy. The beliefs which are articulated by these families might be defined as 'folk religion', a term used by several of the clergy with whom I talked, Mark in particular talking about folk religion in terms of connection. As I begin to conclude this thesis, I explore the term 'folk religion' with reference to the beliefs about christening the mothers expressed, and some of the views about mothers who come to them for christening expressed by the clergy. I argue that the term, 'folk religion' is unhelpful, creating a barrier which allows theologians and clergy to dismiss the beliefs of their parishioners without attempting either to engage with or understand them. In Mary Douglas' terms:

> The very first thing is to break through the spiky verbal hedges that arbitrarily insulated one set of human experiences (ours) from another set (theirs).[684]

This spiky verbal hedge could be seen not just in the words of the clergy (who use it as a way of explaining) but also in the attitudes expressed particularly in the questionnaire responses of respectable congregants (who use it as a way of excluding). Although the questionnaire responses mainly expressed a desire to be welcoming, the answers to the question about changes to the baptism service suggest that the experiences of church members are indeed insulated from those of baptism families and their guests:

[684] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1996), p.8.

> ‘These days it’s all about the party and although parents and godparents appear to engage with the service, many of the ‘huge numbers’ of guests are completely disinterested and some are rude.’[685]

10.1 Ordinary Theology

In 1992, Jeff Astley argued that the institution of the church, and particularly the theologians of the Academy, ought to pay more attention to the voices of laity and their expressions of faith. He placed his argument clearly within the discipline of Practical Theology, suggesting that social scientific and especially ethnographic research methods be used in the gathering of empirical data. ‘‘Ordinary Theology’ would then be an appropriate term for the content, pattern and processes of ordinary people's articulation of their religious understanding.’[686]

However, Astley's ‘Ordinary Theology’ is situated within the context of Christian education. Its aim is that ‘ordinary’ church members should be encouraged to articulate their beliefs in order that their faith ‘develops’. This development is not only presumed but desired: ‘starting somewhere is not the same as finishing there.’[687] While Astley's argument has been an important one, marking the beginning of a shift in attitude towards listening to church members (in the broadest sense), and so establishing, in his terms, a ‘critical conversation’, his desire to challenge beliefs through that conversation means that this is not attentive ethnography. From the initial conversations of my research, I would suggest that many of the mothers I have encountered (many of whom are active church members) may be espousing not what Astley terms ‘Ordinary Theology’, but rather the ‘Folk Religion’, about which Astley is rather dismissive, referring to it as the ‘underlife of religion.’[688]

[685] Elf9.
[686] Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.56.
[687] Astley, p.56.
[688] Astley, p.88.

10.2 Folk Religion

'Folk religion' is portrayed as being a set of inchoate superstitions without structure, so, ultimately meaningless; or it is associated (in this country) with quintessential Englishness and a quaint longing for a pastoral idyll. Several of the clergy I spoke with referred to 'superstitions' which they were inclined not to take seriously, although Mark expressed regret at the turn against folk religion. He suggested it belonged to a working class, and probably uneducated, expression of connection:

> 'This folk religion stuff is about truth. If you haven't got a Christian story, a faith story. That's why people do family trees and stuff, so they can see how they link. .....It's all about a minutes silence in football , people want that connection..... It's making those parts in time, birth and everything like that. People can't explain it, they want to connect. When a doctor comes and explains it, o yes, 'cos they've got the language. When people who are less articulate come, they are more honest. God's grace will come without words.'[689]

Folk religion seems, then, to be about family and community ties linking with an overarching and sometimes institutionalised tradition. Hori, who studied Japanese religions, observed the practice of two belief systems which exist side by side he describes these as the 'little' tradition and the 'great' tradition.[690]

> I believe that the essence of Japanese folk religion lies in the interaction of two belief systems: a little tradition, which is based on blood or close community ties; and a great tradition, introduced from without, which is adopted by individual or group choice. The belief patterns found

[689] Mark 58 – 63.
[690] These were terms which had first been introduced to anthropology and specifically 'folk' religion by Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p.72.

> everywhere in Japanese rural society are complex, multilayered, and syncretistic.[691]

I would suggest that in baptism we may see a similar interaction of belief systems which are, to some extent insulated from each other, and yet operate with mutual dependency. Even the words 'christening' and 'baptism', whose usage is discussed in the opening chapter, indicate different and multilayered understandings. There is a similar complexity within the ideas of blessing or flourishing (discussed in the previous chapter) between the individual and the societal.

Marion Bowman is one of those folklorists who has adopted Yoder's definition of folk religion[692] – she argues that folk religion should not be regarded as a deviation from the norm – doing so would be, 'to mis-understand what is normative.'[693] She suggests that each individual operates within a triangle of individual, official and folk beliefs.[694] It is this triangle which is manifest in the meaning-making of baptism, and which might account for the clergy unease with current practice.

10.3 Folk Religion and Christianity

Folk religion has been dismissed as the 'underlife' of formal religion in Britain since the nineteenth century, when, particularly rural clergy were alarmed by the nonconformist beliefs

[691] Hori, Ichiro, 'Japanese Folk Beliefs', *American Anthropologist* 61/3 (1959), 405-424, p.405.
[692] 'Folk religion is the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion.' Don Yoder, 'Toward a Definition of Folk Religion' *Western Folklore* 33:1 (1974), 1–15, p.14.
[693] Marion Bowman, 'Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion' in *Religion: Empirical Studies* ed. by Stephen J. Sutcliffe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.13.
[694] Marion Bowman, p.4.

of the laity. Although John Wolffe argues that folk religion declined with industrialisation,[695] Sarah Williams in her study of Southwark 1880 - 1939 found evidence of folk religion, referring to the church-based religion and folk religion as two narratives which are intermeshed.[696] She refers to attitudes to church-based rituals – considered to be efficacious, a way of placating the deity and avoiding bad luck.[697] Baptism allowed a child to enter, 'both the earthly fold of the church and the eternal fold of heaven,' suggesting a nominal membership free from obligation, but sufficient to ensure that, at the final judgement, the child would be 'all right.'[698] My data suggests that this remains true today: 'I want God to love her and protect her in a way I never felt as a child.'[699]

Douglas Davies explores some of the perceived conflict the two narratives highlighted by Williams in terms of the self perception of priests. He argues that the term 'folk religion' was 'snatched at' by priests in order to 'justify the self and its sense of vocation to the Christian gospel, amidst the apparently worldly and social claims of the broad membership of the church.'[700] That is, those priests who would dismiss the natural religiosity of those to whom they minister as 'folk religiosity', are actually avoiding acknowledgement of the complexity of priesthood. He suggests that that which is defined (or even dismissed) as folk religion is about meaning-making.[701]

However, priests continued to dismiss what they termed 'folk' religion. Writing ten years after Davies, Jeremy Morris, in a pamphlet written for the Anglican group, 'Affirming

[695] John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.82-3.
[696] Sara C Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880 – 1939* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.12.
[697] Williams, pp.88 – 94.
[698] Williams, p.101.
[699] Bede3
[700] Douglas Davies, 'Natural and Christian Priesthood in Folk Religiosity', *Anvil* 2:1, (1985), p.53.
[701] Davies, p.44.

Catholicism', begins, 'to most church people, folk religion is a pretty derogatory term….[it] is sentimental and undemanding, a black hole into which disappears religious meaning not only of the rite of passage, but also of Songs of Praise, Remembrance Day, Christmas cribs and carols, christingles, hot cross buns and Easter eggs.'[702] He refers to christenings as a problem for the church as they are family centred and he suggests the church, 'impose some boundaries'[703] in order to avoid the danger of being destabilised by this superstition. Although Morris would reject folk religion not just as a term but as a corrosive influence upon Christian faith, he suggests that it consists of rites of passage which are life-defining. In doing so, he acknowledges that rites of passage, in terms of folk religion, are about meaning-making. His critique is that the meaning he sees being made is not the same as that desired by the Church as it seeks to fulfil Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).[704]

> They are the points at which personal experience intersects with the great mysteries of life. But they are also life defining in the sense that they reflect and construct effective relationships, generally within the family. So they touch us in those most personal aspects of our lives, our relationships with others, and our own sense of identity and purpose.[705]

Although Morris is here expressing an understanding of 'folk religion', in so doing he is maintaining the spiky verbal hedge. In previous chapters, I have shown how relevant these words of Morris are, especially in a christening which both clergy and families wish to be 'personal and relational' although at the same time, providing an opportunity to reflect on the 'great mysteries of life'. Of course, as my research highlights, this is an area of ambiguity, where priests are unlikely to rest upon their formal theological learning, but rather upon their

[702] Jeremy Morris, *Catholicism and Folk Religion*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), p.1.
[703] Morris, p.11.
[704] Morris, p.19.
[705] Morris, p.5.

pastoral and prayerful experience. However, all the clergy I talked with acknowledged the complexity (and fragility) of their priesthood, they were reluctant to dismiss either a set of beliefs on the edge of their tradition, or the people who hold them.

10.4 Folk Religion in Staithes

In the early 1970s David Clark spent just over year living in Staithes, a fishing village on the North Yorkshire coast. His observations about folk religion, particularly with reference to the christenings he observed, is especially pertinent here. Clark suggests that 'folk' religion and 'official' religion are sometimes in conflict but sometimes in symbiosis. As he uses the term, 'folk religion' he makes it clear that he is not using it to refer to 'primitive' beliefs but a set of beliefs which are contextually bound, suggesting that the laity often ignore the clergy 'in favour of folk constructs made available through traditional beliefs and the norms of family and community'.[706] He argues that it is the persistence of the folk elements in the rites of passage performed in church ritual which allows the religious element of these rites to persist.[707]

In writing about baptism, he argues that the rite of passage of childbirth is more complex than is suggested in baptism – he sees it more as a process than an event: 'In the case of childbirth, the rite begins prior to the woman's delivery and is not resolved until some time after it. The official rite of baptism forms only part of the total ritual process, which also includes diverse folk elements.'[708] He observes the liminality of the mother during and after childbirth which

[706] David Clark, *From Pulpit to Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.7.
[707] Clark, p.8.
[708] Clark, p.113.

was expressed through restrictions on her movements and activities – these restrictions would persist until her 'churching' which marked a ritual return to her social norm.

Clark also suggests that the child occupied a social status that could be described as liminal; that is, between nature and culture. This was often expressed by the taboo on bringing unbaptised children into the house.[709] A child who had not been baptised was, Clark suggests, a child lacking in identity and therefore impure. He suggests that baptism 'has traditionally been seen as a bridging point between two states,' thus resolving the taboo nature of the child's liminality. [710]

Clark describes a number of practices which he observed surrounding the birth, including gift giving, the wetting of the baby's head, placing silver in a baby's palm, the ritual clothes, and ritual meal. Clark describes one tradition in particular which resonated with my research data:

> A couple told me how their son, now fourteen years old, had on the occasion of his birth been given a small basket containing an egg (for fertility) a packet of salt (for the salt of the earth) and a silver coin ('so he'd always have money'). The gifts in the basket were therefore seen as symbolising particular properties which the child might enjoy in later life.[711]

I encountered a similar tradition in 'the teacake and cheese' or 'amiss', many recalled the practice and it seems to have variants according to locality. It involves giving a package

[709] Although this had not been raised as an issue in my questionnaires, several of the older MU members I talked to in the first phases of my research told me of this tradition which was persuasive in them deciding to have their own babies christened, and one interviewee who persuaded her grandmother that because the christening could not be held for months it would be 'all right.'
[710] Clark, p.116. He explores this in terms of attitudes to infants who had died unbaptised.
[711] Clark, p.122.

containing fruit cake (or fruit scone), cheese and possibly silver to the first person (or child) of the opposite sex to the baby being baptised who is seen either on the way into or out of the church. Although these two respondents came from the same parish there is a difference in the custom as they describe it and as they explain it:

> 'Parcel of cake and scone and a piece of silver, and gave it to the first stranger we met on the way to church.'[712]

> 'When we came out of church we gave a piece of cake and a coin to the first person we met of the opposite sex to the baby (old local superstition to bring the baby luck). When we visited an old lady for tea the first time after the baptism, our daughter was given an amass gift - a paper bag containing a piece of bread, some salt and an egg. The bread of life. The salt of the earth. A symbol of resurrection.'[713]

These practices are intriguing. I would suggest that these traditions, in Redfield's terms belong to the 'little tradition' sitting alongside the 'great tradition'. Few of the women I spoke to could tell me about what the tradition meant, but I would suggest that its perpetuation would indicate how meaningful it has been even though unarticulated. Despite this, it appears to be dying out with none of the women I interviewed referring to it. Is it that it represents something which the proponents of the 'Great' tradition have found to be too conflicting? Or has a process of secularisation meant that aspects of the 'little' tradition have been lost as well as the 'great' tradition. An even more important question is about the meaning – do people tell me about this tradition because it was meaningful; because it represents a naive longing for a mythical past; or because they need to tell me something rather than nothing? It does, however, suggest, as Clark claims, that, this rite of passage is one which is bound up in Clark's words with 'communal identity' – individual uncertainty is

[712] Hild1.
[713] Hild3.

woven with 'facility of community.' [714] This is expressed in those rituals in which all the community (but not the church) participate and which therefore establish an important frame of reference for group identity.

10.5 Blurred Boundaries

It seems, though, that the framework of folk religion, while seeking to take seriously the ordinary beliefs of individuals at the same time offers defining boundaries which dichotomise 'official' and 'unofficial' religiosity. However, certainly in terms of my research, the lines need to be less sharply drawn – in fact the meaning-making would seem to be as much in defining the sacred and understanding meaning as it is in separating 'official' religion from 'folk' religion. William James suggests that in this field of experience 'boundaries are always misty' and may defy definition.[715]

However, the understanding of the 'sacred' is often of importance in the maintenance of group and might be resistant to the domination of official religion, as demonstrated by David Clark. Wilbur Bock wrote an article on the dichotomy that exists between official and folk religion in which he suggests that the conflict which happens between them is because of differing understanding of symbols and the desire of official religions to dominate formal religious space:

> Although many folk items have been deprived of reference to transcendental authority, they have remained ceremonially sacred (i.e. resistant to change) and potential conflict between them and the official

[714] Clark, p.144.
[715] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), pp.39 – 40.

> system persists. The conflict is not always overt because of the lack of clear-cut distinctions between the official religions and all other systems.[716]

Bock is right; the distinction is not clear-cut in many cases. In considering practices such as the amiss: the scone and cheese, this is clearly operating in a different cultural schema to the liturgy of baptism and perhaps could be regarded as 'folk religion' – but other sacred elements of christening – the family, the dress, the sense of continuation do not so distinctively belong to something outside Christianity: they sit more easily within the misty boundaries to which William James refers.

10.6 The Enchanted World

Max Weber borrowed the term 'disenchantment' from Schiller as he described the process of modernity as necessarily leading to a process of disenchantment.[717] That is, as the power of formal rationalisation increased, so also did secularisation and, correspondingly, magic declined. However, Jenkins argues that although modernism has led to increased secularisation this has not been reflected in increasing disenchantment, rather, we are forced to acknowledge, 'the complexity of a world that is neither definitively enchanted nor disenchanted (and which was probably ever thus).'[718] The conversations I had with both mothers and clergy acknowledge this complexity which was particularly notable in the conversation with Tracey whose daughter was communicating with 'people who had passed.'[719]

[716] E. Wilbur Bock, 'Symbols in Conflict: Official versus Folk Religion' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 5:2 (1966), 204-221, p.206.
[717] Richard Jenkins, 'Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium', *Max Weber Studies*, 1:1 (2001), 11 – 32, p.12.
[718] Richard Jenkins, p.28.
[719] Tr25.

It is worth also considering Charles Taylor's 'A Secular Age' in exploring this question. He described the worldview which existed pre-Reformation as enchanted. He goes on to suggest that the secularisation of society has developed from a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing. It is this, he suggests, which has replaced belief in God. He begins by considering the enchanted world which existed before the Reformation. In this enchanted world, some *things* could become the 'loci of spiritual power'[720] so had to be treated with care, 'charged things have a causal power which matches their incorporated meaning.'[721] I have argued that this is the case for the family christening gown. He goes on to suggest that life in the enchanted world was social, the whole community join together in the maintenance of orthodoxy in order to avoid chaos.[722] This also reflects the attitude of my participants as they gather family together in order both to conform to and perform 'tradition'. This may be categorised by some as 'folk' religion or by others as part of a pattern of secularisation. I would suggest that it is neither. Rather, it reflects deep spirituality which is difficult to articulate but yet understood and therefore perpetuated in rites of passage such as baptism. The meaning–making I have explored suggests that for many the world may still be considered, in Taylor's terms, to be 'enchanted.'

The dissonance between clergy and participants I have observed may be accounted for by reference to Taylor's thesis of disenchantment. The clergy, educated in reform tradition are encouraged to rely upon their own faith,[723] self-discipline, and rationality.[724] However many of the mothers I have encountered in my research live with more vulnerability and fear for themselves and their child, 'This sense of vulnerability is one of the principal features which

[720] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusettes, and London: The Belknap Press, 2007), p.32.
[721] Taylor, p.35.
[722] Taylor, p.43.
[723] Taylor, p.78.
[724] Taylor, pp.83 – 86.

have gone with disenchantment.'[725] But I would suggest that mothers are not so disenchanted – those who wish to do their best for the child are acknowledging their vulnerability, and hoping that God's blessing will protect them and so making them less vulnerable.

10.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the category of folk religion, arguing that although as a term it is used to denigrate, actually those who operate within a belief system which has been separated from traditional theology ought also to be heard and their beliefs given credence alongside those of 'orthodox' Christianity. That is, we ought to pay attention not just to the 'great tradition' but also to the 'little tradition'. Secularisation theorists, and particularly Weber, suggest that disenchantment is a key aspect of modernism. I have argued that in the world I have encountered in my research, there is still an element of enchantment (which Jenkins would call re-enchantment) and which suggests that the categorisations and definitions of religion and culture need to develop 'misty' boundaries.

The meaning-making of the mothers in my research sits within those 'misty boundaries'. Those voices which are 'muted' ought to be acknowledged rather than dismissed. The dismissal of those voices as being unorthodox, or not complying to the 'Great Tradition' has been to the detriment of the church whose clergy may just be revealing their own vulnerability when they stop listening to their parishioners. As I conclude this thesis, I shall suggest ways in the which the church and the clergy should take the meaning-making of these women more seriously.

[725] Taylor, p.36.

Chapter Eleven: Concluding Comments and Ministerial Outcomes

11.1 Concluding Comments

This study has explored the meaning of baptism for mothers, through attending to often muted voices of some mothers who have had a child baptised. Although the number of baptisms in the Church of England as a percentage of live births has declined, they remain an important social ritual and are considered by the clergy to be a good opportunity for developing missional work. So, meaning-making is complex and multi-layered, influenced by and integral to social relations and family narrative:

> The theoretical perspectives that guide interpretive inquiry also remind us that meaning is constructed not just by the individual in a vacuum; they are embedded and influenced by interpersonal, institutional, community and societal frames of meaning.[726]

These different frames of meaning are found in baptism which remains a complex social reality for the mothers who participate in it, and for the clergy as they manage conflicting expectations. It provides an opportunity for a public performance of motherhood and more widely of family, at the same time it is performative, conferring upon the infant a social identity, so bringing her into a connective web of relationships.

Throughout this work, I have highlighted the importance of paying attention to the 'muted voices': to listen to those with a different story without being dismissive. In this rite, social, familial, and (so theologians would suggest) Christian identity is conferred on the child through an acknowledgement of family and church membership (however loosely this may

[726] Peter Magolda and Lisa Weems, 'Doing Harm: An Unintended Consequence of Qualitative Inquiry?' *Journal of Student Development,* 43:2, (2002), 490-507, p.503.

be interpreted). The 'tradition' which mothers refer to reflects a desire to connect: to the sacred, to church and to family.

As mothers seek 'the best' for their child, they are expressing their desire for flourishing –a spiritual yearning for God's protection. This spiritual element has been the most difficult to analyse, as the mothers tended to express themselves in terms of the material and the relational rather than the transcendent. Martin Stringer has pointed out that, in general, people do not find talking about religious behaviour easy, suggesting that for many people, religious behaviour is private and personal, so rarely discussed and may only come to light through the long-term work of the ethnographer.[727] I think this may be partly true in this research; perhaps if I had had the resources to engage in a longitudinal ethnographic study, with time to build better relationships of trust with the participants, these private meanings might have been better brought to the surface.

I have been broadly following the Pastoral Cycle, the final stage of which is referred to as 'action'; offering practical ways forward as a result of the reflection. As I reflect on these findings, and how they may affect both my ministry and the ministry of the Church, I have been struck again at how eager the clergy participants were to find ways of engaging with the mothers who bring their children to be baptised. I think they were keen to engage with this work partly to be given answers to those questions. The outcomes, then, are keenly anticipated.

[727] Martin Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), p.96.

During the period of this research, the Archbishops' Council commissioned extensive research in order to help the Church better understand the reasons parents bring their babies to be christened, and to help churches engage with these families more effectively (effectiveness would mean that more of these families become part of the church life, contributing to 'growth'). So it undertook quantitative research with one hundred parents who did not attend church and whose children were aged under two, and six qualitative interviews following these. The results of this are not yet published although a website and literature has been produced as a result of the project and four dioceses have been trialling resources. These were designed to:

- Attract more people to come to the church for baptism.
- Build understanding of what the Church of England provides, and build understanding within the church about what families think about baptism in today's culture.
- Care so much that when do people do come, they want to come back.[728]

I have been part of the working group for the project, having important conversations before the research began and as the project has been developed. One of the most controversial decisions it took was in naming the project. The research of the project, clearly reflects my own research in showing the distinction between the words 'baptism' and 'christening': 'christening' being used by those outside the church. So, with its aim of attracting people, an outward-facing word was used with an explanation which suggests that the sacrament of 'Baptism' is only part of the whole 'Christening' which embraces a wider set of rituals.

[728] www.churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/explore-thinking [accessed 4/7/15].

The aims and objectives of the project were to lead not just to fresh understanding but to enable the local church to engage better with those who asked for baptism for their children. However, there is a danger again that this is church focussed, led by a declining church which is seeking to grow or at least to stabilise the decline in membership. There is an urgency to the agenda which is not reflected in the unhurried and unquestioning way that mothers have taken up their right to have their children christened. The danger, then is that the church's agenda begins to overshadow the beliefs of the mothers and continues to dismiss them as 'superstition' or 'folk beliefs'. Perhaps this is an example of what Neibuhr describes as, 'the enduring problem' of 'the proper relationship between Christ and culture, between the Church and human aspirations.'[729] As I have argued, this is to be taken seriously rather than dismissed as 'folk religion'. Nevertheless, this is a challenge for an increasingly mission focussed church.

It would be better, I would suggest, to engage on a deeper level with what these women have been saying, not to achieve conversion but rather to enable their flourishing. That is, to listen as the rite of baptism becomes part of their narrative: not in order to change the narrative, but rather in order to understand our part in it better. Davies, writing about dual purpose rituals, argues that it is the familiarity and resilience of the ritual (in this case baptism) which allows different meanings to be attached.[730] It suggests a challenge for the whole church, clergy and laity, to recognise and respect these layers of meaning while continuing to maintain the integrity of their own narrative.

[729] H. Richard Neibuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1956), p.26
[730] Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), pp.120 – 123.

In developing ministerial outcomes, it is important to rise above the 'local and anecdotal' while still attending to real voices.[731] While I might anticipate the validity of the ministerial outcomes I propose more widely, it may be that they can apply only to the church in the Dioceses of Newcastle and Durham, and perhaps only to a few parishes within these dioceses. There is always a danger that using my data to make broader statements will undermine its validity. However, part of the purpose of this research was to enable the meaning-making of mothers to speak into my practice and the practice of the Church. The ministerial outcomes which follow offer, in terms of the Pastoral Cycle, some practical outcomes of my research and reflection.

11.2 Ministerial Outcomes

11.2.a Words

The words spoken in a christening service are important, for they are performative: as speech acts, they make something happen. These, as I have argued, are: naming, promising and blessing. At times it is the priest who is speaking, and at others it is the priest who is enabling the speech of others. However, only one of the mothers made any comment on the actual words being used, and that was to say she did not understand what they meant; the others were more aware of the function of the words. At a time when the Church of England has just approved new baptism liturgies,[732] I would suggest that these benefit the clergy more than the participants who are more concerned with performance than words.

[731] This is discussed by Douglas Davies et al, *Church and Religion in Rural England* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p.282.
[732] These were approved by General Synod for use from September, 2015, http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/liturgy/archives/liturgical_auth/ [accessed 16/1/16].

Bruce and Voas suggest that continued appropriation of the rite stems from tradition:[733] 'What drives demand for these rites is a form of nostalgia, not a desire for someone to be religious in our place.'[734] They argue that the language used, therefore need not be updated because participants prefer older (and therefore more 'traditional') forms of liturgy which connects them to the past. Although this view was not voiced in my research, it does support my argument that the actual words used are of negligible importance to the mothers. It is important, therefore, for clergy to adhere to traditional elements of the baptism liturgy, attending to symbol and performance which go beyond the words themselves.

Naming is important as it ascribes identity and although the Church of England's liturgy, as discussed, does not have an element of naming this does not mean the priest could not engage with it, for in acknowledging a name so they are acknowledging the whole person. The giving of a name represents the assigning of an identity. While this decreases in importance depending on the age of the child, it is an important element of the baptism.

'I have called you by name you are mine'[735] are the words used to show God's relationship with humanity. Naming is the core of relationality – when we know someone's name we know who they are. Although few respondents referred to christening being about naming, the ascribing of identity is signified in the giving of a name. While liturgists have been keen to emphasise that baptism is about more than this,[736] because naming marks the beginning of relationship it is an important aspect of christening which the president might emphasise.

[733] They refer here to all the pastoral offices.
[734] Steve Bruce and David Voas, 'Vicarious Religion: An Examination and Critique', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 25:2, (2010), 243-259, p.247.
[735] Isaiah 43:1.
[736] Mark Searle, *Christening: The Making of Christians* (Collegeville,: The Liturgical Press, 1980), pp.31– 33.

As I have shown, the promises made by the godparents towards the child are also important- only reliable, trustworthy people are required to make them. These promises are real, but it may be that the promises being made by the parents and godparents in their hearts are not the same as those which they are required to speak. Perhaps part of the role of the priest is in helping these promises to be explored, rather than in teaching orthodox meanings: this might be during the service itself or as part of the preparation.

11.2.b Blessing

The elements of thanksgiving and beseeching which run throughout the baptism service cannot be ignored – the prayer of deliverance is as important as that of thanksgiving. Mothers want their children to flourish and believe that such flourishing will be enabled by the blessing renewed in baptism. Here the Church and mothers want the same thing: we too wish to see the growing and flourishing of God's people. This happens through relationships. For the child, this may mean through relationships within the family and with the godparents, but the theology would suggest that this happens through relationships with God and his Church.

One way the local church may enable blessing is through encouraging those relationships with the church community, thus enabling and deepening a relationship with God through which the baptised child (and her family) will come to know God's blessing. Already some of the mothers I talked to were making relationships with their church through attending a toddler group or pram service (sometimes disrupted when maternity leave ended) and churches were asking how they could offer invitations which would be welcomed. I would

suggest, then, that rather than asking how we can grow our churches through engaging more of these families, we should focus on developing relationships which lead to flourishing.

11.2.c Preparation

As I have shown, the approaches the vicars in my study take to the preparation for mothers (and families) for baptism varies. Most of the preparation was about explaining to the parents the choreography, words and liturgy of the baptism. Some suggested the beginning of a relationship with someone from the church, usually the vicar. Only in one case did it involve engaging with the meaning the families themselves were bringing to baptism. While hard-pressed clergy may struggle to make this a priority, they may choose to develop baptism teams who might take some responsibility for developing such teams and who may, most importantly, be as interested in listening as speaking in order that a shared meaning of christening may be achieved. In the words of Anderson and Foley:

> Preparation that engages more than it informs, and catechesis that is more ritual and storytelling than data gathering or instruction is an important antidote to the kind of formalism that pervades so many baptism rituals.[737]

However, many of the mothers I talked to who had not even met the vicar before the christening were not at all perturbed by this: they understand the rite (on their terms) and are not really expecting to be brought into relationship. It may be that preparation is less important than invitation. Nevertheless the mothers did talk to me freely, several commenting that they had enjoyed being able to talk about these things with someone

[737] Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p.71.

interested in them. Even those who had received a visit from the vicar had not been given the space to tell their story.

11.2.d Materiality

The mothers, living embodied material lives, all intended to keep the clothes their child had been christened in. In fact they kept not only the clothes but also presents (some of the questionnaire respondents had kept gifts for sixty years and more) cards and the candle. Lisa in particular talked about creating a memory box. So the 'stuff' of the christening becomes part of the child's narrative of identity.

However, most important to the mothers I talked to was being given a candle. None of them had any intention of lighting it again, regardless of what the vicar might have suggested. It would become part of the material memory making kept alongside the clothes and gifts, and incorporated into (or key in the creation of) family narrative. Laura and Mick were invited to collect the candle the week before the christening highlighting its importance and ensuring the child was welcomed by the whole church. The church they attended, knowing how important a keepsake the candle would be, had made a deliberate decision to emphasise its importance and significance for the whole church.

Gift-giving is part of the celebration of christening , expressing in material terms the hope of a future of flourishing. It might be that the church might continue to participate in that gift-giving beyond just the giving of the candle. There may be other things which could be given and so become part of the family narrative – a book of bible stories, a card, a cross. In the *Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child*, a bible is given as a sign of the child's

learning and growing in faith before being brought to baptism. I would suggest this stepping into the catechumenate is also implied in the baptism of infants, and the giving of a Bible equally appropriate. In St Ebba's church the knitting group make knitted angels which are given to those being baptised as a gift from the people of the congregation. The giving of such gifts implies ongoing relationships between the church, the child and the family.

Through the baptism service there are also material symbols: water, oil, the sign of the cross, and, in Common Worship, the wrapping of the child in a white shawl, and the giving of a lit candle. These symbols have been more important than the words, especially to those women who completed the questionnaire, and ought to be embraced – so that a substantial amount of water is used in the font which connects through generations of the same family; so the signing with the cross is something the godparents can join in with – becoming part of the liturgical action; so the shawl, as the material link through generations, is brought into the meaning making of the liturgy and the realm of the sacred.

The church itself is an important material element of christening. Families return to the churches in which they feel some connection through community or family history (only Lisa had chosen the church for its aesthetics). This space which often the 'occasional congregation' is reluctant to enter and yet know that in so doing they are encountering the sacred is of symbolic importance to the family as well as to the church. As part of their family narrative, it becomes not only the site of blessing but a focus for the identity of the child and the family. It is important, then that the welcome extended acknowledges this previous connection and encourages an ongoing connection.

11.2.e Celebration

Throughout this research, I have observed that the christening of an infant or child is a moment of celebration in the life of the family. Often this celebration is accompanied (underpinned) by a sense of thanksgiving, and maybe relief. Over half of the women I talked to told me stories of loss and longing in bringing this child to life. The child being presented for baptism brings hope and promise for the future, she represents the perpetuation of the family who gather together to celebrate. This is a celebration both of the life of the child and the continuing (or renewed) life of the family – howsoever constructed.

The church service, while incorporating the sacrament of baptism, might also be a place of celebration. This begins with hospitality, so that those who do not usually attend church may be warmly welcomed, and mothers who are trying to do the 'right thing' are acknowledged and encouraged. This hospitality begins with the vicar but includes vergers, church wardens and pastoral assistants. Some churches who have lay people appointed to be baptism visitors who befriend the family: this ensures both welcome and ongoing relationships. In the baptisms I observed, the congregation would be invited to applaud the child at the welcome and the vicar walk around the church displaying the child to the congregation. Hospitality also requires an acknowledgement of the gathered congregation's desire to celebrate, so that rather than muttering, 'they only want an excuse for a party' they might begin to ask what such a party might mean, recognising that for the church, too, each child who is baptise is worth celebrating. The Church might choose to offer its premises for the party afterwards. This would be doing something more than acknowledging the celebration, it would be offering it a blessing.

Several of the churches in this research offered some sort of celebration of the child's baptism. The mother's Union at St Aidan's organised a 'Teddy Bear's Pic-Nic' to which baptism families from the previous year were invited. Several women who completed questionnaires remembered receiving cards on the anniversary of their child's baptism, they had appreciated this continuing contact with the church. These things indicate the importance the church gives to baptism as a cause for continued celebration rather than a one-off event.

11.2.f Belonging

It is clear that many of the mothers in my research felt a sense of belonging to the churches they brought their child to for their christening. This sense is usually because of either family connection or previous attendance (however infrequent).[738] Paul Chambers suggests that this sense of belonging which draws individuals or families to churches is dependent upon 'a set of social relations linking churches to their surrounding catchment.'[739] Again, this depends upon the development of personal relationships and social networks which extend into the community. In order to foster a sense of belonging, churches need to become as familiar as home and as trustworthy as family, while becoming places of shared narrative and invested meaning.[740] Chambers claims that churches need to:

> Identify those networks of individuals and groups in the community that most closely match their own collective social and cultural characteristics and seek either to establish or to exploit existing relationships to a degree where the level of trust outweighs perceptions of risk.[741]

[738] Sarah Farrimond refers to this as also a feature of weddings, *Ritual and Narrative in the Contemporary Anglican Wedding,* Durham University e-thesis, (2009), 276.): http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/78/219 [accessed 23/6/2013].
[739] Paul Chambers, *Religion, Secularisation and Social Change in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p.211.
[740] The understanding of home here reflects that of Theano S. Terkenli, 'Home as a Region', *Geographical Review,* 85:3 (1995), 324-334.
[741] Paul Chambers, p.221.

Relationships will develop not just in naming but through welcome, hospitality and over time. The clergy were already considering how best to express that hospitality: appointing baptism 'visitors' to befriend families; spending time at 'vicar's vestry' as the first point of contact; offering individually tailored services; delivering services which engaged congregations thorough 'fun'; inviting families to come to church the week before the christening to receive a candle and welcome. Clergy were also aware of developing long-term relationships through toddler groups. Several were prioritising 'Messy Church' which is aimed at a slightly older age group. If Mark is right, and it is always difficult to manage babies in Sunday morning services, then churches do need to consider alternative times, or even places, where welcome may be offered.

11.3 Epilogue

Before this project started I was interested in how the gender of the priest affects the symbolic of baptism, expanding Gill Hill's research in how women might perform baptisms differently. There was one question on the questionnaire about this but many of the baptisms they referred to were before women were ordained. However, there are issues around gender and the Church which could be valuably developed. Throughout the research period I have been criticised for excluding fathers from my research. It was mainly because mothers do usually play the active part in the performance of christening. Although I did meet one father who was deeply engaged with the plans for the christening, the research could also be developed with an exploration of father's attitudes.

The Church needs to engage with the polysemy of infant baptism if the rite is to continue to be meaningful for all participants. This will mean paying attention to the 'chatter of

mothers'[742] in order to develop relationships that endure. Baptism may, then, continue to be understood as a symbol of hope for the flourishing of all people: a celebration of the love of God.

[742] 'The chatter of mothers, sharing the work of raising the world is not in the texts, is banished from the canon, is another discourse hidden from the acts of cultural memory. It is not found in important conversation'. Brenda Clews, 'The Notebook of the Maternal Body', *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, 3:1, (2001), 7-18, 22.

Appendix 1: Information Sheets and Participant Agreements

Phase 1 Focus Groups

Project Information sheet

The Meaning of Baptism to Mothers in Newcastle Upon Tyne who do not usually attend Church

Approved by University of Durham Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee

I am carrying out a research project at the University of Durham exploring what it means for those mothers who do not usually attend church but who bring their babies to Baptism. One of the suggestions which I wish to explore as my research begins is to ask some women whose children may now be adult whether they had their babies baptised and what that meant to them then, and to discuss with them the extent to which they would try and persuade their own children to do the same.

I will be recording my findings through taking notes of conversations and recording focus group discussions. Transcriptions of the recordings will be retained and may be referred to in future work without further permission being sought from participants unless this is specifically requested (see consent form) . The actual recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project (this is anticipated to occur in 2015).

The findings of the research will be written up in my thesis which will be published online and may be rewritten for publication in print.

All information will be handled under the Data Protection Act: electronic data will be stored securely on a password protected computer.

All respondents are guaranteed anonymity unless otherwise agreed – no real names of individuals, businesses, organisations or places of work or contact addresses will be used in reports or dissemination of research unless you request it. However, there may be identifying features of communities which are recognisable despite name changes and the research will be situated in Newcastle.

Allison Fenton, Postgraduate Student, DThM

Department of Theology and Religion

I can be contacted through the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham,

by email: *or by telephone .....*

Phase 3 Interviews with Mothers

Project Information sheet

The Meaning of Baptism (or Christening) to Mothers who do not usually attend Church

Approved by University of Durham Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee

I am carrying out a research project at the University of Durham exploring what it means for those mothers who do not usually attend church but who bring their babies to Baptism. At this phase in my research I am talking to women who would like to have (or who have already had) their baby baptised (christened) at their local church..

I will be recording my findings through taking notes of conversations and recording focus group discussions. Transcriptions of the recordings will be retained and may be referred to in future work without permission being sought from participants. The actual recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project (this is anticipated to occur in 2015).

The findings of the research will be written up in my thesis which will be published online and may be rewritten for publication in print.

All information will be handled under the Data Protection Act: electronic data will be stored securely on a password protected computer.

All respondents are guaranteed anonymity unless otherwise agreed – no real names of individuals, businesses, organisations or places of work or contact addresses will be used in reports or dissemination of research unless you request it. However, there may be identifying features of communities which are recognisable despite name changes and the research will be situated in the North East.

Allison Fenton, postgraduate student,

I can be contacted through the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham, by email: *or by telephone*

Phase 4: Interviews with Clergy

Project Information sheet

The Meaning of Baptism (or Christening) to Mothers who do not usually attend Church

Approved by University of Durham Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee

I am carrying out a research project at the University of Durham exploring what it means for those mothers who do not usually attend church but who bring their babies to Baptism. At this phase in my research I would like to interview incumbents about their baptism practice, the liturgy they use and how they reconcile any tensions which they might encounter between pastoral practice and theological understanding.

I will be recording my findings through taking notes of conversations and recording focus group discussions. Transcriptions of the recordings will be retained and may be referred to in future work without permission being sought from participants. The actual recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project (this is anticipated to occur in 2015).

The findings of the research will be written up in my thesis which will be published online and may be rewritten for publication in print. All information will be handled under the Data Protection Act: electronic data will be stored securely on a password protected computer.

All respondents are guaranteed anonymity unless otherwise agreed – no real names of individuals, businesses, organisations or places of work or contact addresses will be used in reports or dissemination of research unless you request it. However, there may be identifying features of communities which are recognisable despite name changes and the research will be situated in the North East.

Allison Fenton, postgraduate student,

I can be contacted through the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham, by email: *or by phone on*

The Meaning of Baptism for Mothers in Newcastle Upon Tyne who do not usually attend church

Please complete this to show your consent to participate in this study

Please cross out as necessary

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES / NO

Who have you spoken to. .....

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

* at any time and
* without having to give a reason for withdrawing YES / NO

Do you consent to have your discussion digitally recorded on the understanding that the recording will be destroyed at the completion of this project but that the transcripts will be retained for future use? YES/NO

Please include your name address and telephone number if you would like to be contacted in the future should I wish to use excerpts from the transcripts in future publication beyond my thesis

Signed ..... **Date** .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

Appendix 2: The Questionnaire

Project Information sheet

The Meaning of Baptism to Mothers

Approved by University of Durham Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee

I am carrying out a research project at the University of Durham exploring what baptism means for those mothers who do not usually attend church but who bring their babies to baptism. I am working in 6 parishes across Newcastle and Durham, and your parish church is one of those participating in the research.

In the first stage of my research I asked women around the diocese about their experiences of baptism, what they remembered and how it was important to them and their children. In this second stage, I would appreciate your help as I seek to explore those issues further through this questionnaire. Even though it may seem like a long time since you had your children baptised (or 'christened') I would be grateful for your memories, if possible referring to your experience primarily with your first child. I think it will take about half an hour to complete this, you may need to think about some of the questions. If you need more space to answer any of the questions in more depth, then please feel free to write on the back of the questionnaire.

I have not provided any space for you to include your name or other details through which I would be able to identify you – this means that you will remain anonymous, and your responses unable to traced back to you. If this questionnaire raises issues for you, or there are things you would like to discuss with me in person please contact me either through your parish priest, or using the contact details at the bottom of this sheet. If you would prefer to discuss any issues raised for you with someone else, and in the context of your participation in this research you would be welcome to contact: Revd Dr Frances Dower, she is a qualified and experienced counsellor and priest.

In the next phase of the research I shall be interviewing some of those mothers who do not usually attend church about their experience of bringing their baby to be baptised at your church.

The findings of the research will be written up in my thesis which will be published online and may be rewritten for publication in print. All information will be handled under the Data Protection Act: electronic data will be stored securely on a password protected computer. All respondents are guaranteed anonymity unless otherwise agreed – no real names of individuals, businesses, organisations or places of work or contact addresses will be used in reports or dissemination of research unless you request it. However, there may be identifying features of communities which are recognisable despite name changes and the research will be situated in the North East.

Allison Fenton, Postgraduate Student, DThM, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham,

The Questionnaire

About You

1. Date of Birth:

2. Your Occupation:
(if you are retired please say so and also state your occupation before retirement)

3. Your husband/Partner's Occupation
(if he is retired please say so and also state his occupation before retirement)

4. Were you married at the time of your baby's baptism?

5. Are you married now?

6. Which church do you attend most regularly?

7. Did you attend church regularly before the baptism?

    a. If not, when did you begin attending church regularly?

About the first child you had baptised

1. Date of birth of the child:

2. Male/female (please delete as appropriate)

About the baptism

1. Where did the baptism/christening take place?

2. Was that the church of the parish in which you lived?

    a. If not, why did you choose that particular church for the service?

3. When was the baptism/christening? (month/year)

4. Was the priest who performed the baptism/christening male or female?

    a. Did this make any difference to you, and why?

    b. Did you request that a priest you already knew perform the baptism? If so , why was that?

5. Was there any formal preparation for the service?

6. Did you have any kind of rehearsal in church before the service?

7. Did the baptism/christening take place during the main Sunday service?

    a. If not, at what time of day did it take place?

8. Were other babies baptised/christened at the same time as yours?

    a. If so was this a matter of concern to you?

9. How many invited guests did you have?

10. What did your child wear?

    a. Do you still have it?

    b. If so, where is it kept?

11. Who was it who approached the vicar of the church representatives in the first instance to arrange the baptism/christening?

12. How many godparents did you have?

    a. Were they male or female (how many of each)?

    b. How did you choose the godparents and why?

    c. Looking back, would you choose your different godparents? (and if so why?)

13. Did you have some sort of ‘party’ (tea or lunch) after the service?

    a. If so, where?

    b. How many guests were there?

    c. What did you eat and drink?

    d. Was there a special cake?

14. Did your child receive baptism/christening gifts?

    a. If so, from whom?

    b. What were these gifts?

    c. Do you still have them?

15. Were there any traditions of baptism/christening which were important to you and your family?

    a. If so what were they?

16. Were you given a lighted candle during the service?

    a. If so, do you still have it?

    b. Have you ever lit it again?

17. What difference did it make to have your child baptised/christened?

    a. For you?

    b. For the child?

18. What was special about the whole day for you?

19. Were there any aspects of it that were particularly:

    a. Enjoyable?

    b. Disappointing?

20. Was there any contact between you and the parish afterwards?

21. Is there anything important you'd like to tell me about the baptism of your other children?

22. Would you change anything about your first child's baptism?

Questions about baptism/christening in general

1. What do you think about your church's attitude to people who come for baptism?

    a. How do you feel about that?

2. What changes have you seen between the baptism/christening service as you experience it with your child or children and those who have attended most recently?

3. What do you think are the most important symbols of baptism/christening?

4. Have you ever attended a nonreligious baby naming ceremony?

    a. If so, how did it differ from baptism/christening

5. Would most people in your church community prefer the term 'baptism' or 'christening', and why?

Thank you for your patience and goodwill in completing this questionnaire. Please place it in the envelope provided and leave it in the box provided at the back of church by November 30th, 2012

Appendix 3: Questionnaire Data Summary

St Hilda

- There were seven questionnaires returned.
- The mean age of the respondents was seventy five years with a range from sixty six to eighty six years.
- All of the women had worked, mainly in administration.
- Most of their first children were christened between 1953 and 1975.
- The babies were two – four months old at the time of their christening.
- None of their babies were baptised at St Hilda's church, one was baptised in a garrison church abroad, one was in rural Northumberland and five in other city churches.

St Elfleda

- There were fourteen questionnaires returned.
- The mean age of the respondents was sixty three years with a range from forty three – eighty two years.
- Two of the women were 'home-makers' the others worked in the caring, nursing, education or administration.
- Most of their first children were christened between 1958 and 1979, although one was in 1992.
- The babies were, in the main, one – four months old at the time of their christening, although one was sixteen months.
- Five of the fourteen babies were baptised at St Elfleda's church, two were baptised in other countries, one elsewhere in England and six were baptised in churches within a ten mile radius of St Elfleda's church.

St Aidan

- There were sixteen questionnaires returned.
- The mean age of the respondents was sixty three years with a range from thirty six to eighty one years.
- The women either had worked or were still working in nursing, administration or sales.
- Most of their first children were christened between 1962 and 2014, these were evenly spread across the decades but there were none in the 1990s.
- The babies were, in the main, one – eight months old at the time of their christening, although one was seven years old.
- Seven of the sixteen were baptised at St Aidan's church, two were baptised elsewhere in England and seven were baptised in other churches across the Diocese.

St Bede

- There were five questionnaires returned.
- The mean age of the respondents was sixty years, with a range from forty nine to sixty seven years.
- The women worked, or were still working in nursing, education or administration.
- Most of their first children were christened between 1972 and 1995.
- The babies were, three - seven months old at the time of their christening.
- None of the babies were baptised at St Bede's church, all were baptised in other churches in the city.

St Cuthbert

- There were two questionnaires returned.
- The respondents were seventy and eighty one years old.
- One was a shop assistant and other worked in insurance administration.
- Their first children were christened in 1955 and 1976.
- The babies were three months and four months old at the time of their christening.
- One of the babies was baptised at St Cuthbert's, the other elsewhere in the diocese.

St Ebba

- There were fourteen questionnaires returned.
- The mean age of the respondents was sixty three years old with a range from twenty eight to eighty one years.
- All of the women had worked or were still working as support workers, in administration, nursing or teaching.
- Most of their first children were christened between 1954 and 2009.
- The babies were, in the main, one – four months old at the time of their christening.
- Eight of the fourteen babies were baptised at St Ebba's church, one elsewhere in the diocese and five were baptised in churches within a five mile radius of St Ebba's church.

Appendix 4: Christening Photographs

1. Four generations of the same family

2. With the godparents

3. Christening cakes

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